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MOUNTAIN MADNESS

"If she guessed what I am feeling now," he thought, "she w
speak to me again"

MOUNTAIN MADNESS

BY

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NEW YORK

GROSSET & DUNLAP

PUBLISHERS

THE NEW YORK
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MOUNTAIN MADNESS

MOUNTAIN MADNESS

CHAPTER I

FIVE O'CLOCK IN THE VALLEY

"NOW, I wonder," said Judge Denby, smiling in his wonderful quiet, sunshiny way, "just what those dear children are doing?"

Mrs. Forsythe smiled, too, and shook her head. "They do so love prowling over these mountains!" she said. "Tell me, Judge Denby" (her years of acquaintanceship gave her the right to a more intimate form of speech, but she had never availed herself of it) "are all the things one hears of about this part of the world really true? It seems so odd, here in these terribly civilized, sophisticated surroundings, to imagine that a really wild, lawless, adventurous life may be going on all about us! Do these exciting things that are

reported really happen, or are they just—fairy tales?"

It would be hard to describe the life of the Warm Sulphur Springs colony to one who had not seen it. Imagine all of Broadway, Fifth Avenue and Wall Street reduced to a finely accentuated and condensed quantity, and you may have a faint idea of what this tiny oasis of ultra-fashion stands for—or did in the days which this story records—in the center of towering ranges representing vast and undirected conditions and impulses. In the great hotel and its little entourage of cottages, casinos, bath-houses, etc., were all the salient and living facts of wealth and luxury, raised, by isolation, to a point of insolent exaggeration hard to equal even in this day of extravagant extravagance.

Here were booths and rooms where jewelry, laces, model gowns, books, flowers and so on, could be had for but very little more than twice their normal market value. Here the stock-brokers had their feverish, pulsing tickers; the women their tea-rooms and bridge. For the more uncontrollably restless souls there was always roulette in private rooms,—'Private,' because the

management did not officially countenance gambling. There was also dancing, and the best orchestra that Ned Sperry, the hotel manager, could get together.

"Are they all fairy tales?" repeated Mrs. Forsythe, clinging to her first idea,—which was the undoubted incongruity of the law-abiding and well-ordered place, and the lawless matter under discussion.

Judge Denby hesitated a moment before he answered her.

"Not altogether," he said, quietly.

The Judge and Mrs. Forsythe sat in the mammoth hotel office, which might have belonged to a perfectly good palace, among clusters of palms and fragrant flowering plants, with well-groomed men and beautifully gowned women moving about. It was one of Sperry's fads to make his foyer (as he called it) a rainbow place, of many-colored lights, and the chain of electric jewels ran soft and lustrous for what seemed an incredible distance.

The Judge was still considering Mrs. Forsythe's question.

"And what have you heard—concerning these fairy tales?" he asked, at length.

"Why, I heard," proceeded Mrs. Forsythe, "that there had been mobs, lynchings even, near here!"

Judge Denby's handsome old face hardened for a moment.

"A man was lynched five miles away a year or so ago," he said, "but they paid—they paid!"

"Tell me," urged Mrs. Forsythe, with that morbid curiosity almost invariably present among the virtuous and normal ornaments of society, "what had he done—this poor man?"

"He was—a murderer, and worse," said the Judge.

Mrs. Forsythe shivered, as though something terrible and unknown had paused in passing to touch her on the shoulder.

"But the gangs or bands of outlaws," she went on, "one hears so much about them. Are they bogies, or what?"

"There are such bands," said Judge Denby, slowly. "The man who was lynched was one of them."

"Then the others—the ones who 'paid'—were law-keeping citizens?"

"They were not keeping the law when they lynched a man," her companion said grimly. "As I tell you, they paid—quite a number of them. But there are other things less gruesome, dear lady, and almost as exciting. Let me tell you, for instance about a case——"

And all the time she tried to understand the problem of the lynching of that unknown man. Why was the Judge so bitterly, even revengefully proud of having made them "pay" for that? She looked at the clean-cut profile of her old friend, in a helpless puzzled way. Though she was not a subtle woman, she had her intuitions, and she sensed something not only incomprehensible, but sinister.

Mrs. Forsythe was a plump, well-dressed, typical woman, still blond of hair, fair of face and carefully groomed at all times,—the sort you see by the thousand in every fashionable resort in America, only varying in degrees of clothes and manners. Mrs. Forsythe was superlative in both. She was a frankly conventional being, and on

studying her one felt instinctively that never by any condition of chance could she have done anything but the proper thing. Jack Radnor, engaged to her daughter Enid, sometimes felt a spasm of panic as he looked from one to the other. They were absurdly alike in lòoks, in spite of Enid's present youth and slenderness and alert ways. Jack used to wonder in terror whether Enid would be exactly like her mother when she reached her age! He liked Mrs. Forsythe, but he hated to look forward to a day, however remote, when he should have to pass down the pathway of life with her replica.

If he had even seen a certain wistfulness in her eyes—a wistfulness which betrayed itself seldom, and of which she herself was hardly conscious—he might have altered his uncompromising twenty-seven-year-old judgment of his future mother-in-law.

There was, however, none of the wistfulness in her expression at present. She looked very well indeed in the pretty light,—already the little electric lamps were glowing through their soft-toned

shades, and the negro waiters were passing tea in the big palm-lined hotel office.

Judge Denby, looking at her critically, yet smiling, thought he had never seen a woman who held her coloring and her carriage so well. He had known her as a young man, when she was something of a belle, and he and the late James Forsythe were only drops in the metaphorical bucket of her admirers.

The orchestra, composed of strings only in the afternoon (Sperry had a discriminating instinct worthy of a stage manager when it came to effects) was playing, *"Then you'll remember me."*

It is one of the simplest, yet most plaintive of airs, and because it is simple and plaintive and old-fashioned it stands among the immortal little melodies of the world.

"When other lips and other hearts," sang the violins; you could almost hear the words. The strain carried both Denby and Mrs. Forsythe back a quarter of a century. They looked at each other and smiled, rather sadly.

"How you used to flirt!" said the Judge with seeming irrelevance.

"Surely not!" Her smile was less sad.

"Surely yes! Look at me!—and poor Dick!"

The smile left her lips.

"I have not thought of him for nearly thirty years," she said quietly. "I don't believe I ever —flirted—with him."

Judge Denby lifted his eyebrows, but did not contest the point.

"He—dropped out, you know," he went on.

"Yes," she said, looking straight before her. "I know he dropped out.—There! They are playing that new thing of Sousa's. I think I am glad. Those old songs make one sentimental, don't they?"

Judge Denby looked at her curiously. He wondered just what connection there was between "those old songs," sentimentality and Dick,—who had dropped out so many years before. However, he was a man who conserved his mental forces. He wasted no time, intellectually speaking. Such minutes as he spent in speculation were usually with a definite purpose.

A bell boy came up with a tray and envelope,

and Mrs. Forsythe, with a murmured apology to the Judge, examined it.

"It's a telegram—and for Enid!" she exclaimed. "I really think I'm justified in opening this—though I have theories about interfering with my daughter's correspondence."

She tore open the envelope. "Why—Enid will be delighted!" she cried, and read aloud:

"Was going North but changed my mind at Covington. Coming up to the Springs to spend Sunday with you. ALICE."

Mrs. Forsythe laughed.

"How like Alice Baker! Making up her mind in a second's time like that—and—the telegram! About twice as many words as necessary! But I'm so glad she's coming. So, I think," she added, with a significant pleasant glance at Judge Denby, "will be some other people!"

"Ralph?" His fine eyebrows lifted quizzically, his smile was not displeased.

"Miss Baker is attractive," he said. "I am glad to see that my boy is carrying out the traditional good taste of the family, though, of course, if it might have been *your* daughter——"

She laughed at him.

"But Enid is such a thoroughly settled proposition," pursued the Judge, "that it seems heresy to even think of her connection with any one but young Radnor."

"Do you think so?" Enid's mother looked thoughtful. Just a shadow of the wistful look came into her eyes—just a ghostly expression of something she was trying to understand in her child. "Sometimes I wish I could be quite sure! But I know she cares for Jack. It's just that I don't think they have quite found each other yet, —at least sometimes I think so. More often I don't. You know I am not a bit of a consistent person!"

She laughed and helped herself to tea. The Judge declined. He seemed vaguely restless, and, in fact, after watching Mrs. Forsythe sip from her cup for half a minute, rose as impetuously as could be expected of fifty odd years and two hundred and twenty pounds.

"I have important business to attend to, dear lady," he explained, bowing in his own inimitable way over her hand. It was a courtly way and yet

very gently mocking, as though he played a charming game which he knew by heart.

"Arthur Denby is just what he was twenty-five years ago," said Mrs. Forsythe to herself, looking after his tall, commanding figure as it swung its way among palms, and glittering tea-tables, and pretty women, to the great doors. "How do men with such heavy responsibilities keep their youth? I suupose it is because the life he leads is so vital, so active, so out of the rut of things."

She finished her tea, and went to join some women friends in a quiet game of bridge before dinner.

CHAPTER II

FIVE O'CLOCK IN THE HILLS

We fair fine ladies, who park out our lives
From common sheep-paths, cannot help the crows
From flying over,—we're as natural still
As Blowsalinda. Drape us perfectly
In Lyons velvet,—we are not, for that,
Lay-figures; look you, we have hearts within,
Warm, live, improvident, indecent hearts. . . .
—E. B. BROWNING.

AT that very moment her daughter Enid was resting—during a long ride with her fiancé, Jack Radnor,—on one of the mountains of which Judge Denby talked.

They had dismounted and climbed to a tiny peak from which it seemed as though the whole world were visible.

Jack, on the rock above her, stared down at her bright head as she sat perched a little below him.

He could not see her face so he could know nothing of the varied current of emotion that was passing over it in ripples of expression. She looked as usual: Enid, exquisitely groomed, lovely of figure, a perfect, dainty thing, crowned with living gold, that made him very hungry with longing as he looked.

"If she guessed what I am feeling now," he thought, "she would never speak to me again!"

And, if he could but have known it, Enid was thinking very much the same thing!

Slim and straight as a little white birch tree, Enid carried with her an elasticity, a delicacy, and a freshness that was almost a fragrance. "What a lovely young girl!" people always said, and, sometimes unconsciously, the emphasis was apt to be upon the young. She was golden-fair of hair, and her eyes were golden, too, a strange and exquisite color-combination, very startling indeed when first come upon. Her fair skin was just the creamy side of pure white; there was nothing of the skim-milk variety about it, yet it was of lily-like purity. And her mouth was a bright though very light scarlet, as were the swift wonderful

flushes that came and went in her cheeks and chin, —Enid's coral-tinted chin was the despair of her rivals and her adorers—for different reasons!

Her dearest friend, Alice Baker, always said that Enid had picked out Jack Radnor because his coloring toned in with hers so splendidly. He was a study in browns, just as she was a symphony in the tone gamut of ivory and gold. His hair and his eyes and his clean, clear skin, were all brown.

"Such a pity!" Alice had once mourned, "They're lovely as a picture, but eugenically quite impossible. They *couldn't* have a blue-eyed baby, and blue-eyed ones are far the prettiest!"

Enid herself did not quite know why she had chosen Jack from the half dozen eligible young men on her string. Of course, any one of twenty women she knew could have given her twenty perfectly good reasons, which she would doubtless have discarded with disdain. There were quite a number of "points" to be accredited to Jack, even by a disinterested observer, and there were practically no disinterested observers, among the women. He was very decidedly good to look at. He was an excellent all-round sport; he had a

brain, and business ability. He had a sense of humor, and he could dance, and he was just as polite to old ladies as to young ones at dinners,—that is to say, he made them feel that he wasn't being polite at all. He was considered a typical man's man,—the kind always most popular with women—and had the utter simplicity which nothing but breeding has ever been known to give.

These things, however, as have been hinted, were largely discounted by Enid. In fact, they annoyed her by their obviousness, and puzzled her as to why, in spite of them, she had selected to bestow upon him her favor. She felt that not one nor all of such qualities could have won her without something much bigger than they behind them. This something she called "Primitive Force," the "Eternal Masculine," the "Elemental Male," and so on. But there was nothing aggressively primitive about Jack Radnor. Of course, he was a nice, strong, manly, well-set-up chap, but he was very far indeed from being a Cave Man. If he ever had any desire to knock her down and carry her off to a lair, he concealed it with exasperating suc-

cess. Enid herself was quite sure that it would have horrified him to dream that speculation of such a nature had ever entered her débutante head. What then was the answer?

The answer, though she was destined to travel a long road before finding it, was in Enid herself.

She had completely convinced Jack Radnor that she was the Perfectly Proper Young Person, and, though he loved her to distraction, he would have choked rather than faintly shock her maidenly reserve and well-trained sensibilities by even an intonation that was too unrestrained.

"Jack," said Enid, abruptly, "what interests you most on earth?"

"You," said Jack, promptly, truthfully, but without undue fervor.

Enid flushed angrily.

"You don't *have* to say things like that!" she snapped.

"All right," her fiancé returned, unruffled, "then I won't. May I smoke?"

"I wish you would smoke just once without asking permission!"

He lighted a cigarette without answer, and, as

she was not looking, bent forward and very lightly touched her hair. It thrilled him through and through, but when she turned upon him sharply he was smoking unconcernedly, with quite a detached expression in his brown eyes.

Enid drew a deep breath of exasperation.

"You are so trying!" she complained. "You always do the proper thing in the proper way—and——"

"So do you, bless you!" he said, smiling indulgently. "Don't fuss, Enid! Isn't it too good a day to waste on a quarrel?"

Enid scowled, but stared out over the valleys, silver-threaded, that lay at their feet.

"It *is* a good day, Jack!" She stopped, and did not seem to know how to go on. Which of us have not felt the urge of that which we cannot even define, much less express! After a minute, Jack put his hand upon her shoulder, very gently. It was a mute question and encouragement,—and a promise, too, if she had been old enough to read more than printed matter. But perversity made Enid shrink from the tentative caress a trifle petulantly, and Jack, with a slight tightening of his

lips, leaned back, thinking: "There's no use! They've made a waxen image of her—the darling. When we're married, shall I ever be able to turn her into a real honest-to-God woman?"

And Enid thought: "If he had been a real man he would have kissed me anyway!"

Sometime, some Titan god engaged in the formation of the universe, spilled a great giant arm load of his properties upon that area of land which was one day to be called "Virginia." Enough of caverns and mountains and glades and gorges and boiling springs growling of hell, and sunlit peaks singing of heaven, and fertile valleys, and sweet gardens, and lonely waste spaces, were flung upon Virginia to fit out a dozen ordinary states.

And, given some of nature's most mad and gorgeous stage-settings, man went to work to build bizarre monuments to what we are pleased to call Civilization. Here in a small section men and women live the superlatively social existence; yet here, in the wild area all around, men and women touch depths of human and untamed experience hard to credit by those with a restricted education. Perhaps nowhere in the world do super-cultivation

and super-savagery come so close together. The adventurous soul could lunch among millionaires and dine among outlaws, without the slightest difficulty.

Only there are no adventurous souls, so they don't find that out. Or if they do, they keep it to themselves, as one would keep the secret of a new and highly valuable patent.

"Jack," Enid gave a little gasp, "what does it all mean—that?"

She pointed to the great gleaming gold and green stretch between them and the purple mountain range beyond.

"What *is* it?" she added, vaguely and ineptly, as she realized, "what is it to *you?*"

"A background for you, dear."

He was quite sincere. And he was not lacking in depth nor subtlety either. Enid Forsythe *was* all that he loved and wanted on this earth, and the green and golden and violet world was, to him, barely good enough for her stage-setting.

But, because she could not think of him like that, she only winced, as at a sort of impertinent and casual persiflage and shrank again. And the glory

of the day, and the valley, and the rippling ranges —royal in their purple and gold—hurt her very much indeed.

"Have you any idea," she demanded cruelly, "how entirely you are out of the picture?"

"What is the matter with me?" was his imperturbable query.

"Your clothes, for one thing. So *rotten* perfect! Imagine those riding togs on a primeval peak like this!"

"I don't believe," said Jack, mildly, "that a bear skin, or any thing of that sort, would do any better. Hard to ride in, you know, and on a horse one *does* want to be comfortable."

"Oh, I know you're frightfully keen on your riding!" cried Enid, frowning pettishly. "But your sort of riding always suggests polo to me,—or steeple-chasing—and—and that!"

"Well," said Jack, still without rancor, "that's all right. You have to ride a bit—even in polo, you know. Likewise steeple-chasing."

His clothes were good; whether the fact were against him or not could be best determined by unprejudiced arbitration. Being big, brown, and

about as well put together as a man may reasonably be,—not to say a bit better,—he seemed to belong in his riding breeches, just as he belonged on his horse.

It was an unfortunate accident, considering Enid's point of view, that he really preferred correctly built clothes to those of amateurish design and manufacture. Enid knew that he was handsome prepared for a horse, and handsomest of all when he was on one; but it irritated her that he did not appear before her arrayed in a Mexican sombrero, flannel shirt and the rest of it. It was an insult to her elemental emotions that she had never seen him unshaved, and that his boots were made by Morton and Morton's—and fitted.

"Heaven's! We'll be late for tea!" she remarked suddenly, rising and shaking out her riding-skirt.

The loop and the button that held it at her side had missed connections, and she adjusted it with a lithe bend of her young little body and a pretty show of trim black riding boot.

It was against Enid's principles—or what she thought were her principles—to notice hands, at

least, a man's hands. Hands were, or should be, necessary appendages to the human, utilitarian frame. But she had never been able to avoid noticing Jack Radnor's.

They were hands that meant something—a man's hands, a gentleman's hands—and full of power: long-fingered, strong, sensitive, strikingly handsome. They had a language of their own—the more eloquent because he used them seldom and sparingly, and only to definite effect. Enid had more than once caught herself shrinking from vagrant pictures of those firm, well-shaped gentle hands: sometimes knocking a man down, sometimes caressing a woman. . . .

As Jack Radnor busied himself with her reins and stirrups, she had a queer cringing, yet appealing self-hatred, because she could not take her gaze from his fine fingers as they moved deftly about her business and comfort.

When he and she were both mounted, it was with an infinitely greater shock that she realized that all the time she had been wishing that these same hands—which after all, and with all her vagaries, she loved best of all the hands ever made

by God—had just once lingered in their self-appointed task of—touching her.

Turning, she accepted Jack's help and made her way down the rocks to where the horses were waiting.

"You may put me up," she said in her sweetly imperious way.

Jack bent, and in bending hid a smile that was just a little bitter. As the small boot rested in his clasped palms and he let her swoop lightly upward to the saddle, he felt a mad desire to stop her halfway, to catch that springing, exquisite body to his heart and hold it close, to rain kisses on her face and hair, and to treat her for one short moment as the Woman he Loved, instead of the Girl he was Engaged To.

However, he mounted her with punctilious indifference, caught the hanging curb to place in her hand, and examined the girth, as impersonally as though she were not two inches away from him all the time.

"She's hopeless," he thought, swinging himself onto his horse.

"He's impossible!" was Enid's indignant de-

cision—and her indignation, in some queer inverted way, seemed to rankle more against herself than him.

And just then they came in sight of two figures, which reaching their vision at that particular instant, registered in an astounding fashion.

After one glance, they turned to each other in sheer wonder.

"How simply magnificent!" they murmured, as with one voice.

Surely it is needless to add that the two figures coming toward them along the trail, were those of a man and a woman.

CHAPTER III

A SHORT STUDY IN CONTRASTS

A restlessness of heart, a silent yearning,
A sense of something wanting, incomplete—
Not to be put in words, perhaps avoided
By mute consent. . . .

—ROBERT BROWNING.

. . . O Pan,
How gracious is the mountain at this hour!
. . . The sun
Is shining on the brilliant mountain crests,
And on the highest pines. . . .

—MATTHEW ARNOLD.

BOTH were well worth looking at. The man was tall—as tall as Radnor himself—and exhibited a prodigal expenditure of strength and magnificence quite in keeping with the mountains of which he seemed an integral part. He was fair,

—or one gathered as much from his rough tawny crop of hair. His skin was burnt deeply by the sun—not to the smooth brown that covered Jack's clear-cut face, but to a color more ruddy and alive; the sunburn of a very fair man. With his hawk-like blue eyes, the splendid fling of his great limbs, and that glowing, coppery coloring, he might have been a young god, just descended from the dazzling ether, or sprung up from the flaming heart of the earth. Enid absolutely gasped when she saw him. Even his clothes were right—a loose shirt, open at the neck to show his strong sun-burnt throat and sleeves rolled high up his fine arms, and the roughest of trousers and top-boots. He carried a shabby old hat in one hand, and a huge bunch of mountain laurel in the other.

As for the girl—if Jack did not actually gasp at the sight of her, he certainly did pull up his mount with an involuntary jerk, which much surprised that animal. Champion had been hired by Radnor by the month and had grown used to the lightest of snaffle riding, and the most reassuring of knee-pressure. So he reared, did the horse, just to show his amazement. But, even in quieting him

with apologetic hand and voice, Jack Radnor did not once take his eyes off the girl of the mountains.

She was—what was she like? He discarded a dozen similes in a single breath. A June rose?—But a June rose suggested something a trifle too cultivated. If there were a June rose, as opulent and as gorgeous as the hothouse variety, yet growing wild, then it might be like this woman. She was very young, yet mature with the adolescence of almost savage conditions. Her feet were bare and not small but beautifully shaped, her supple waist was large and her neck straight. One knew at once that she had never worn shoes nor corsets in her life.

Her coloring was dark and radiant, all crimson bloom and deep eyes that could flash or dream, or both at once. She was a Woman, first and foremost. She reminded Jack of Eve, as she might have looked in God's First Garden. And the temperamental possibilities in her struck fire from his own none too tame impulses. There was a girl who would know how to love! he thought.

And even in thinking it, he felt vaguely ashamed and disconcerted, not only at an indirect disloyalty

to Enid, but at an equally indefinite disrespect to the woman herself.

He would have ridden on at once, but he saw that Enid had reined up.

"I beg your pardon," she was saying, in her clear, rather quick utterance, "but would you very much mind telling us where you got that lovely laurel? I've ridden all over this range, and it's the most perfect I've seen."

The young mountaineer stared at her as though he were a trifle dazzled by the vision she made in her light tan habit, with the sun on her hair. Her hat was hung from her pommel and her head looked as though covered all of gold. In a moment he spoke, slowly:

"I reckon you wouldn't find this, likely; it grows up on Gray Crag, where the climbing's stiff."

He hesitated a moment, then added, dropping his eyes from the brightness of her face: "I'll get you-all some, if you like."

Jack felt his face heat quickly as Enid said, in an eager tone: "Oh, I *wish* you would!"

Gray Crag, eh? And "stiff climbing!" And he was tacitly assumed to be unequal to the feat. The

peculiar, calm rage that comes to deep-feeling men well schooled to self-control, assailed him. He sat like a statue on his horse, without a change of expression, not even realizing that Champion was curvetting about and doing a few restless stunts on his own initiative, until the fair-haired mountaineer remarked with a slow grin:

"Say, stranger, you can ride some, can't you?"

Then, pulling up, Radnor caught not the man's but the woman's eyes. They were dark and very eloquent. Irritation against Enid, and perhaps something more, made him in his turn join the conversation.

"We've gone a bit out of our regular riding range. To get back to Warm Sulphur Springs the shortest way—just where do we turn?"

It was the girl at whom he looked, and, speaking for the first time, it was she who answered him, in a rich drawling voice:

"Better go through the Toll-Gate at Four Trail Crossing. That's Dad's."

She was looking at him with a candid, yet timid, wonder in her beautiful eyes. Jack, in speaking to her had, as a matter of course, uncovered; and

while she had seen plenty of men without hats, this was probably the first time that one had doffed his on her account. In common with many women, she loved incense, and had never had nearly enough of it; and this new and delicate deference went to her head.

She looked at him accordingly.

A woman's eyes may convey the subtlest flattery in this round world. If the flattery is too obvious and, so to speak, plainly labeled, it is rather apt to put a man off; but there is another sort, sincere and yet shy, which will wing its way to the most adamantine sensibilities. This girl's flattery was of that sort and—Jack's sensibilities were not precisely adamantine.

"Why, then, of course, we'll go on there!" said Enid promptly. And to the man she added: "Won't you show us the way, please?" To the girl: "Perhaps you could let me have a glass of water when we get there. I'm so thirsty!"

The man and the girl of the hills turned and led the way down the trail, and then to another trail aslant from it. With the heavy deep emerald foliage for a setting they looked more splendid

than ever. But neither Enid nor Jack turned eyes in their direction.

Enid toyed with her reins, and tried to keep her face averted from her lover. After a moment, he said, with some constraint:

"Aren't we a bit late as it is?"

"Well," returned she, with spirit, "that's all the more reason to go the shortest way we can. Isn't it?"

"Surely," said Radnor, "if you are certain it will be the shortest way."

They rode on without speaking again.

The path ran in a sharp slant from the upper Ridge, through close-crowding mountain trees. It was steep and rough, and deeply shaded for the most part. Once in a while, it would zig-zag out into the orange light of the late afternoon, and the mountainside would seem all at once to drop away from them, leaving man and girl riding only on the edge of open space.

The lower hills, heavily plumaged with rich and various gradations of green, swept in great waves to the east. A stormy enough sea they made at close range, but as they melted into the purples

and blues of distance, they grew calmer of aspect, presenting a misty, undulant expanse, softened by miles of cloudy air, suggestive of dreams and mystery. Beyond rose the crests of other and higher mountain ranges, saffron in the sunlight, pure indigo where the cloud shadows lay upon them.

They rode on in silence. A constraint was on them. More than once, one or the other would draw a quick breath, startled by a sudden brilliant glimpse of sunlit valley or far-off hills, but they did not speak to each other.

They plunged into a darker, more thickly wooded stretch. It was the faintest possible trail to follow,—evidently but little traveled, and carpeted with moss and dead leaves. It smelt heavily of the woods, the fragrance that always lingers where sunlight seldom finds its way between interlacing branches. The horses' hoofs made no sound; there was only the infinitesimal clink of the bits, the subdued creak of leather. . . . It was cool and dim, and the path, eternally turning and twisting before them, kept them wondering as to what was around the next bend.

Then, all at once after a sharper turn than

usual, it suddenly mounted toward a bare sky-line. There were no more trees,—only low scrub oaks, and the other dwarf things that are significant of high places and higher winds. The trail became as steep to ascend as it had been to descend. The horses strained upward, stumbled on loose stones, and seemed to pull themselves to that bleak sky-line with a series of scrambling plunges. Another effort; they were up! And—

This time there was no suppressing the involuntary gasp. For, apparently, they were poised on the utmost edge of infinity.

A little clearing, set at a dizzy angle, sloped straight before them for perhaps a hundred feet. There was a small, low house perched against the background of blue ether, and there was a sign nailed to the front of it. Red-brown roads ran from it east and west for a few yards, then disappeared enigmatically below the edge of the plateau. And all around was mile upon reaching mile of—Nothing! Clouds, sky, swimming sunshine, winds so boisterous and tingling that they seemed almost visible,—but nothing else.

As they gazed marveling, a bird came into view

far away, floating speck in blue and golden space. It looked immeasurably lonely, and gave a strange and convincing impression of the unbelievable height and emptiness of the element through which it was slowly winging its way.

It was their first sight of Four Trail Crossing,—that remote high place, posed sublimely, almost miraculously, above the solid facts of the old brown earth and its ways.

CHAPTER IV

THE TOLL-GATE HOUSE

I got up the mountain edge and from the top saw the world stretch out. . . . And then I thought no more, but my heart leapt to meet the wind.

—MAURICE HEWLETT.

EVERYTHING in this world can be seen from different angles, under different lights that make for a million results and eventualities. The lady in the poem who said "yes" because it was candle-light and not day, understood this truth. We all know that the artist's eye can discern purple in a rail fence, and it is an indubitable fact that a grouchy German critic once declared Verdi's melodies to be "hard and harsh!" Behold, my comrades, there is no essential Truth; it is all and always a Point of View!

The sudden panorama which opened out before

Enid and Radnor, as they let their horses advance, took on an incredible glamour from the mood and the conditions which controlled their first glimpse of it. They had seen wonderful and impressive views before, but this seemed something new, and utterly marvelous.

The vision of mountains far beneath may suggest wonder, awe, terror, admiration—a variety of things. To Radnor and Enid certainly, and perhaps to the other two as well, it spoke of romance and the impossibly lovely. The trail just before was thickly wooded, and when they reached that great open sweep of the unknown they trembled and dreamed.

The young mountain couple were standing in front of the Toll-gate House as Enid and Radnor rode down to it, and in a moment a very tall, roughly dressed man with a flowing gray beard came to the open door and scrutinized them with the keen peering look common to those who are accustomed to facing the wind and sun.

"This is Dad," said Polly, briefly but with a rich drawl. She seemed to consider it an ample and adequate introduction.

"Going to Middletown?" the Toll Keeper asked.

He clearly considered them in the light of travelers; so Polly felt it incumbent upon her to elucidate.

"She wants water," she said, indicating Enid.

The Toll Keeper's face changed pleasantly. He promptly became unofficial and cordial. They were now his guests and he received them accordingly.

"We can find her something better than water!" he exclaimed. "Polly, can't you make some tea?"

He was looking at Enid with a kind sharpness that puzzled her. One would almost have said that he found something familiar about her, and could not entirely place it.

Still looking at her closely, and in a gentle tone that contrasted in a singular fashion with his unpolished appearance, he added, "May I help you down?"

They noted that he did not say "ma'am," and that when he came to her stirrup it was with a carriage and air lacking alike in self-consciousness or servility.

When they had dismounted, the younger mountaineer went with Radnor to the barn, and helped him with the two saddle horses. Enid meanwhile went in to the Toll-gate House with the old man and his daughter.

So it came about that these four went together to the Toll Gate and Four Trail Crossing, and were made welcome by Richard Mason, who kept it and who was the girl's father. It appeared that her name was Polly: the sunburnt young god who was "going with her" (Enid had never heard the phrase before) was Martin Hale.

Richard Mason was what nearly anyone would have styled a delightful and perfect type. Only they would have been reasonably certain to get the type wrong. Classifying types is a tricky business; picking winners is child's play to it. The psychologist or the novelist or many of those unnatural, impertinent beings doomed by vocation or avocation to prey upon, and to pry eternally into, persons' affairs, would almost unanimously have put him down as a splendid specimen of the Old Mountaineer,—rugged and hardy, not too scrupulous and dowered with the inevitable charm which

theater-goers can always discover in no education and objectionable table manners.

As a matter of fact, the Toll Keeper was as perfect a host as Enid Forsythe had ever met, for all his ostentatiously rough and awkward ways. He was a splendid-looking old man, with great dignity and authority of bearing, and when he bowed over her fair little hand, she had a fleeting impression that he had for the moment forgotten his part and was playing himself!

He flatly refused toll, and insisted that they make him the debtor by taking tea in the Toll-gate House.

It was the strangest, airiest, most remote place in which Enid had ever been. It was as clean and fresh as water and hill winds could keep it, but there was something more about it—something free and fine and far. After trying to analyze the impression, she realized that it was partly because the house stood so high, and on such a barren space, that there was nothing to be seen from doors or windows but sky. One might as well have been floating above the world. . . .

Polly brought out queer, old-fashioned blue

cups, and Enid settled herself with an air—well-known to her lover—of having made up her willful little mind to stay—and probably to stay for quite a time.

As they had tea, they grew friendly enough, though it was not until much later that Enid and Jack found out any but the most superficial particulars of the lives of their new acquaintances. What they learned later, we may quite as well learn now.

Richard Mason was something of a mystery even to those who knew him best. He had come to the hills many years before, had married a woman of the mountains, and had never to anyone's knowledge, left the upper range even for a day. There was a vague general impression that he had been a man of education before he had turned to the wilderness, though usually he made a point of affecting a manner ruder and views more primitive than his mountaineer associates. On rare occasions he had been known to speak with profound bitterness of some great wrong once done him, some unspeakable injustice which after these many years could still whip him to fury with a bare recollection. But he made no close confi-

dants. Perhaps the most intimate friend he had was Martin Hale.

It was an odd friendship; for they were thirty years and more apart in age, and both were silent men, solitary by nature and sternly reticent. But they liked and understood each other, and when Hale had proposed to Polly, unemotional as he had made himself, Mason had felt something almost akin to joy in the thought of giving his girl into such good keeping.

Martin Hale had been born in the mountains, of a long race of mountain people. Something of the hills' strength and quiet, something of their dignity and aloofness, had gone to his making. Like all mountain-bred folk, he had strange eyes; they seemed focused on horizons, infinitely wider than those of people of the valleys; they looked always a trifle absent and abstracted, as though seeing visions and dreaming dreams.

He had lived all his life among the hills where he was born. His father was a type by no means uncommon in the Virginias; a man of good and sound stock, but a stock run wild. With no education himself, old Hale had seen no reason why

his son should have any. Martin's secret mastery of reading and writing had, when discovered by his father, been the cause of their first stormy quarrel. First, but far from last. The two had wrangled intermittently for the length of the elder man's life, and the bitterness of his early youth had inevitably increased Martin's innate reserve. He had gone on with his reading, and had contrived to give himself a measure of education, but, although his father had left him with enough money, he had never availed himself of the possibility of going away to see the world of men. As a boy he had dreamed of faring forth to dare and do, but as a man he shrank from it. He found himself with each year growing more a part of his native ranges, and now indeed it seemed to him that he could scarcely breathe any air but that of Liberty Ridge.

But his love for the refined and graceful and cultivated things of life and civilization remained. It was the same instinct which had made him turn to books and fight for them. Mountaineer though he was, he would always be essentially a man to whom the delicate, the rare, the fine, the balanced

and restrained, would speak in a special music of their own.

This impromptu tea party was an epoch-making affair for Hale. He was too shy to look at Enid very often, but he was acutely conscious of her all the time. And he liked Jack Radnor at once.

An instant freemasonry sprang up between the two young men. Each recognized in the other something big and vital and male, something which they could mutually respect. Jack Radnor, in spite of his superficial conventionality, was very democratic at heart. There was not a trace of snobbishness in him, and the young mountaineer had fine enough acumen to sense the fact, and to accept the Valley man as an equal and as a possible friend.

It was "Radnor" and "Hale" within twenty minutes, and immediately they plunged deep in man's talk of riding and shooting and fishing, while Enid made friends with the Toll Keeper and his daughter.

The old man was easy enough to get on with, but the dark, lovely girl was as shy as some sensi-

tive wild creature of her own mountains, and disposed, it seemed, to regard Miss Forsythe, if not precisely as an enemy, at least as an intruder.

Now, though Jack Radnor liked old Mason and young Hale, and admired Polly—who had never looked more beautiful than she did now as she moved with her quiet lynx-like step about the room,—he still felt annoyed with Enid. She had pointedly ignored his existence since they had met the mountain couple, and, though in many ways Radnor was a simple soul, he did not like it. Also, once in a while, he really preferred to have his own way. So did Enid.

It is odd that temperamental persons can almost never understand each other. He who is addicted to moods and impulses is as a rule the last to comprehend the moods and impulses of others. So, when Enid, acting on an impetuous and entirely insincere instinct, said: "How lovely! Of course, I shall stay for tea!" Jack was furious.

"Don't you think your mother will be anxious?" he remarked, as formally and coolly as he could—for he deeply desired to shake her.

Enid adored her mother, and, if Jack had not admonished her in that superior and chilly way, she would doubtless have expressed contrition, anxiety and a wish to relieve the maternal mind as swiftly as possible. As it was, she hastily killed a pang which was beginning to rend her conscience, and turned a perverse back upon her fiancé.

"I am sure that Mother will know that I am quite able to take care of myself!" she said, even more icily than he had spoken.

It was impossible to mistake the inference. So far as taking care of her went, Jack Radnor was as completely dimissed, not to say eliminated, as though she had rubbed him off the slate.

He went white with anger this time, and said frigidly:

"In that case, and since you don't need me, I shall explore the neighborhood. Hale, will you have a cigarette with me outside?"

He could not have stayed in the same room with her another moment without becoming violent.

The young man went out with him, and both

girls followed them with their eyes—with what a conflict and complexity of thoughts and emotions no mere writer could record.

The cigarettes lighted, Jack remarked casually: "By the bye, just whereabouts is—Gray Crag?"

CHAPTER VI

GIRLS

To mount a hill is to lift with you something lighter and brighter than yourself or than any meaner burden. You lift the world, you raise the horizon; you give a signal for the distance to stand up. . . . The distances unfold unlooked for wings. . . .

—ALICE MEYNELL.

A BIT later Martin Hale came back into the room of the Toll-gate House, with the shadow of a grin upon his handsome face. The golden-haired lady had asked him to go to Gray Crag for the superlatively lovely mountain laurel, but it was the other fellow who had hazarded that enterprise for her after all. And who was he to stop Jack Radnor from risking his neck for a whim of his sweetheart's if he wanted to? They were both men, and they played a man's game.

"Where is Mr. Radnor?" aked Enid Forsythe, before she had time to think. Then she flushed and bit her lips.

"Oh, round somewhere," said Hale, with another slight grin.

Polly had one of her quiet, almost uncanny inspirations.

"I reckon he's gone to Gray Crag for that laurel," she drawled.

Enid stared from one to the other of them. Martin Hale nodded slowly.

"Gray Crag," she repeated. "Where— But of course, I remember— But you said it was awfully hard to climb!"

"Nastiest bit hereabouts," agreed old Mason, cheerfully.

Enid half rose to her feet.

"But—but it must be dangerous!" she exclaimed.

"Sure!" nodded Martin Hale. "Leastways, for one that's not used to it."

Enid controlled herself, but she found to her horror that her lips were quivering.

"He—he'll never be able to do it!" she said.

"Of course, he'll give it up, and turn back, when he finds——"

"Not he!" said Martin Hale. "He'll do it all right."

He liked Jack Radnor.

"He's all right?" said Mason to Hale, with marked emphasis.

"Sure! But there'll be trouble to-night, take it from me."

"I'm afraid so!" said the Toll Keeper. Then, as though dismissing something, he turned to Enid.

"Don't you worry, missy," he said.

"I'm not worrying!" she said sharply, and crimsoned resentfully.

Then dimly conscious that her very denial had in a sense convicted her, she flushed more deeply than before, and, turning to her young hostess, said, "Won't you let me brush my hair, please? It must be shockingly messy!"

Polly led the way to her own room without a word, but a sort of wonder was in Martin Hale's eyes. Did this slim little gold-haired goddess really think that she needed a brush—or anything else for that matter—to make her more dainty,

more adorable than she was? Never had Hale seen such fineness and delicacy; such trimness and perfection of finish. If only Polly would keep her hair tidy, like that, and take pains with her clothes, and—his vague discontent trailed off uncertainly. Even he realized that Polly could never be a second Enid. They were types as different as the poles. Hale with his curious poet's soul yearned at present toward the refinements of life rather than the elementals. To him, though he hesitated at admitting as much to himself, Polly seemed overblown; not quite coarse (she had too much natural sweetness and dignity for that) but certainly too primitive. Enid to this man of the mountains stood for those fragile, idealistic things that one may dream of without daring to think of touching.

Masks! Is there anyone who does not wear them, and wear them to their own undoing at that? Polly, had he only known it, was far closer to the girl of his ideals—the spiritual, aloof thing that he had made a mental picture of,—than Enid. Enid was as much more of a savage primitive woman, for all her well-cut clothes, and her dainty ways,

as Radnor was more of a savage, primitive man than this tanned young mountaineer. Right at their hand, you perceive, just what each wanted, to be had for the asking—and none of the four knew it!

Polly Mason's bedroom was shabby, but it showed a distinct effort toward beauty. Clearly this girl, who had admitted during their talk that she only visited the Valley for semi-annual shopping expeditions, had an artist's soul in her, evinced in a dozen pretty tricks of arrangement, and light, and decoration.

All around the room was a dado or frieze of something so new and exquisite that Enid exclaimed involuntarily at sight of it. Subconsciously, she had been hunting for something of Polly's (beside the girl herself) that she could admire wholeheartedly. Well, she had found it!

A foot or so below the ceiling ran the frieze, and it was made all of leaves—beautiful silhouettes of leaves on a silvery background, truly lovely, indescribably decorative. Enid's inexperienced eyes picked out maples, rose-red, brownish-green oak-

leaves, and many others, all in their natural and inimitable colors.

"And that?" she questioned softly, pointing with her riding crop to a delicate five-leaved outline. "Woodbine, isn't it?"

"We all call it Virginia Creeper," replied Polly Mason. "You see, two of the leaves are red; I got it in the fall."

Enid looked again more closely.

"Why, they're all real!" she exclaimed in wonder.

Polly laughed.

"'Course they're real," she said. "You don't suppose we can afford to *buy* picture-things, Dad and I, do you?"

She explained the process: that of picking the most perfect leaf specimens possible, pressing them carefully, and mounting them on squares of birch bark.

"Mart cuts the bark," she said, "and sees that it's even. Then we glaze it—cover it with varnish, and—and—it looks right pretty, don't you think?"

"I think it's too lovely for words!" Enid replied

with sincerity. "But how do you keep the proportion—the balance—the composition——"

She sought for words that would be comprehensible for the other. But Polly understood her easily enough, and found words for her, too.

"You mean—how do I know what leaves to put next each other?" she suggested, with simplicity. "Which won't spoil the others?"

Enid nodded.

"It—it's so *right*!" she said. "Your taste must be very perfect and true!"

"I've always liked that sort of thing," said the mountain girl indifferently. "Here's a brush and comb, if you-all want to fix your hair."

Enid began to pull out hairpins, and her vividly golden locks fell in shining waves about her shoulders. Busied with their arrangement, she did not notice the look in Polly's eyes as she stared at the bright ripples. Then a question, very slowly drawled, fell on her ears:

"Do you dye it often?"

She turned and stared, with the hair-brush in her hand.

"Heavens, no!" she gasped. "I don't dye it at all. Why on earth should you think that?"

"I didn't know the Lord ever made anyone with hair that color," said Polly, calmly. "I thought they had to do it themselves. I know I'd be willing to! Look at my hair!"

She pulled forward a ruffled dark tress, and glowered at it; then she turned her spendid eyes upon Enid's.

They stared at each other in a rather hostile fashion for almost a minute; then, suddenly, they both laughed, and so became friends.

The law of equation is a queer thing; hard men married to saccharine wives find their outlook broadening and softening in proportion as the ladies become more and more restricted and adamantine in their ideas. Because the society girl and Polly of Four Trail Crossing were so unlike, an uncanny sympathy sprang up between them. The men in whom they were interested figured largely of course,—men always do,—but, to their mutual astonishment, the girls themselves liked each other, independently of any male element.

"You're the loveliest thing I ever saw in all my life!" Enid said to Polly, with an honesty that robbed the remark of insolence.

Polly laughed outright at that, and showed her white teeth.

"So are you!" she cried.

Then they laughed together, and all at once some mask which each of them had felt bound to wear dropped, and they stared at each other, with the laughter, warm and sympathetic, on their lips.

"Listen to me!" said Enid impetuously, throwing aside the brush. She looked like an adorable little girl when her hair was down. "He—Mr. Hale—said something just now about—trouble. Is he—are any of you in trouble, truly?"

Polly hesitated, but the other girl's golden eyes were so clear and candid that she made an impulsive movement nearer her.

"You know," Enid went on eagerly, "I do want to help—somehow—if I can!"

Polly hardly knew how to answer her; how to put the situation. She did not express herself readily anyway, she had few woman-friends, and training of years had made her secretive concern-

ing mountain matters. But something sweet and sincere and girlish in this "young lady from the valley" broke down a great barrier in a very speedy fashion, and, answering Enid's quick, sympathetic outreaching of hands by putting hers into them, she said, rather huskily:

"We're all in bad,—Dad, and—and Mart,—and the bunch. The others—the rest of our folks have gotten a heap more daring lately—more rotten, Dad and Mart say; and—You won't tell?"

"Tell!" Enid's voice rang with a fiery scorn. She flung her arm about the other's shoulder. "Go on—*please!*"

With her face hidden, and speaking almost as though it were against her will yet pressing closer to that slender protecting arm, Polly tried to explain:

"There are a lot of things that Dad and Mart won't do. They—they're not strong for the law, either of 'em, but they believe in fair play and decency. But some of the others get—sort of crazy; and they—we all have to stand together. See?"

In truth, Enid was beginning to see.

"You mean," she said slowly, "that your father and Martin Hale have to stick to this gang they're in with, even when things are done that they don't approve of, and wouldn't do themselves?"

Polly nodded.

"It's pretty hard on them," she said. "They can't give any of the lot away, but——"

"But," interrupted Enid vehemently, "why don't they break away from them? They can do that surely!"

Polly looked at her, smiled quietly, and shook her dark head.

"I reckon you-all don't know much about the mountains," she said. " 'Tisn't healthy to back out, once you're in,—not among us it isn't!"

"They're not *afraid!*" Enid started as if stung.

And over Polly's warm brown face spread a deep flush of resentment and pride in one.

"I reckon there's not much this side of hell they're afraid of, either of 'em!" she said, withdrawing. "But—there's someone in the Valley that has hold on 'em. I don't rightly know who it is, but they can't afford to get into trouble, either way, because he could get back at 'em too hard."

"But even so," broke Enid hotly, from the depths of her inexperience, "they're men, and can face it! There's no real reason——"

"There's—me," said Polly.

The resentment had died out of her voice and face. She stood before Enid a little limply, strangely humble in her admission of being, in some psychological fashion, a burden. She seemed almost to have shrunk in physical stature in a single moment.

Enid stared at her, realizing the situation which demanded the "false truth" of males for the protection of the women they loved best. Then she held out her arms, with her face breaking into lovable, beautiful little lines of understanding and sympathy.

"Oh, you poor darling!" she murmured, and her voice shook.

Polly went into her arms without a word.

Somehow, without many words, things got cleared up and explained in a marvelous fashion then. With Enid's bright gold hair falling over Polly's dark head, with their two voices mixing and sobbing and breaking off, the thing became

extraordinarily plain, without any accurate exposition of the facts in the case. Words are, after all, the least useful of all means of human expression.

As it turned out from Polly's eloquent, if incoherent, whispers and her still more eloquent hesitations, it was not that any individual of the "gang" had designs upon her. It was only that Polly had learned a simple, rather terrible truth that in the wild places of the world a woman is always a factor tremendous for good or evil—usually the latter.

"Are any of them in *love* with you then?" asked Enid—adding quickly, "I mean——"

She stopped, but Polly flushed as though she interpreted what she did not say.

" 'Tisn't that," she said, very low. "But Dad says—when men like that are round he'd sooner lock me up than the toll-takings."

She dropped, shamed and serious, in saying this. But Enid, looking at her, experienced an odd sensation. She found it difficult to analyze it at first, and it appalled her when she realized with a shock that she almost envied Polly because she was so much desired.

CHAPTER VI

ENID OF THE GOLDEN EYES

. . . One whose tedious toil
Had watched for years in forlorn hermitage,
Who had not from mid-life to utmost age
Eased in one accent his o'er-burdened soul,
Even to the trees. . . .

—JOHN KEATS.

MARTIN HALE and old Mason smoked in the living-room of the Toll-gate House. The winds that were never still at the Crossing talked insistently at the doors and windows—interpolating, interrupting, interpreting as winds will. The younger man was restless, more than once he rose from his seat by the fire and went to stare out into the cloudy dusk; more than once he glanced at the closed door of Polly's room behind which the two girls still talked inaudibly.

The older man was thinking of the past, the younger of the future,—no! Not of the future! It was the present that Martin Hale thought of. . . . And oddly enough, the thoughts of both of them centered on Enid, the lovely little lady from the Valley. To the Toll Keeper she stood symbolic of all that he had once had—and lost.

Polly's mother had been a shy, silent creature of the hills; it was not of her that he was thinking. She had been beautiful in a wildwood style, but neither clever nor of vivid personality. Polly had inherited her physical loveliness but little else. It was Richard Mason's own keen mind and vibrant vitality which made the girl so splendidly appealing and alive. Mason, soured and embittered by early wrongs, had turned savagely to the opposites of everything which before had gone to make up life for him. A man of violent extremes in all things, he plunged into primitive existence as fiercely, as whole-heartedly as, in his first youth, he had plunged into the subtler atmosphere of civilization. He was determined that the future should be as widely different as possible from the past.

Because he had been in his day something of an exquisite in a wholesome way, he took a perverse pleasure in adopting the rough clothes and rougher manners of the mountaineers; because he had once been impulsive and gregarious, he now elected to live almost entirely alone, consorting only with men as habitually unsocial as himself. Because the girl he had loved had been the quintessence of daintiness and breeding, a charming, polished young creature who was the veritable flower of his Great World, he chose for his wife the inarticulate, shy woman of the hills who was Polly's mother.

And as he sat there smoking he was thinking of that other girl. She was smiling at him across a great gulf of years, but even from so great a distance the smile came beautifully familiar. It was a smile which was an old friend. . . .

Martin Hale took another restless turn up and down the room, he had let his pipe go out. The Toll Keeper watched him without seeming to do so for a space; at last he laid his pipe down on the arm of his chair and spoke in the quiet way that

never jars upon the most ragged nerves nor the most capricious moods:

"Funny, isn't it, how all at once a little thing'll set you-all off your track?"

Hale started and stood in his uneasy pacing. The older man continued meditatively, as though to himself.

"There's me, for instance. Live shut up in these hills—funny thing to say 'shut up' in the hills, eh, boy? But I reckon you could feel shut up in God Almighty's house of mansions if you weren't—well, let's say acclimated some! But anyhow I've been here, rooted at Four Trail Crossing for a quarter of a century and never a jolt in all that time to get me out of the rut that was leading straight to the grave."

He paused, picked up the pipe and puffed.

"Well?" said Martin Hale, rather gruffly.

"Eh?" Mason had apparently forgotten what he had been speaking of.

"What has—jolted you?"

"That little girl there." The Toll Keeper jerked his head sideways toward the closed door.

"You mean, Miss——"

"Yes, her. She's like a little piece out of my young days come to life after all this time—after all this time!"

He gazed into the fire with the veil of dreams showing before his face.

"She's very beautiful," said the young man, and it seemed as though he spoke with difficulty.

"Eh? Oh, yes—beautiful. She's more than that. She's just all the sweetness and the foolishness and the lovingness and the unreasonableness of girls tied up in one dear little woman. Our Polly's worth ten of her, I reckon, but that yellow-haired lassie is going to make more trouble and more joy than ever Polly will. . . . I loved a girl once that was the copy of her. The same gold hair and gold eyes and the same pretty way with her that said: 'Do it for me because no one can have so much right to it as I, and it's mighty nice of me to let you do it!' Yes, just such another."

Old Mason laughed rather tenderly. Hale and he were not of the kind given to exchanging confidences, but in a moment the young man said bluntly, yet without impertinence.

"What happened?"

"Happened? Oh, my best friend lied about me and kicked me out of her running. That's why I came up here to the hills. I married Polly's mother, and—and—I've never seen the Valley since—I've even stopped thinking of it much until —until to-night. That girl set me—thinking—"

"And the other girl—the one you loved—married the other chap, I suppose?"

The old man's face hardened grimly.

"No. That she didn't! She married, but not him. I've yet my score to settle with him. I don't know where she is now. But after all these years she seems to-night to stand almost at my elbow. An old fool I am, to be sure!"

The door of Polly's room opened quickly and Enid Forsythe came out. Her face was pale and eager; her golden eyes burned like stars.

"Mr. Hale," she said abruptly, and with a sort of sweet authority, very characteristic of her, "won't you let me speak to you a moment?"

Though she did not add the word "alone" it made itself almost audible in the pause that followed her swift speech. And her simple and

naturally imperial manner robbed the request of any element of discourtesy to the Toll Keeper. Here, it seemed, was an inherently royal young creature so sure of herself as to be able to command and request with equal immunity from the suggestion of offense.

Without a word Martin Hale rose and, going to the door, held it open for her. She passed through it, and he followed, closing it behind them. Polly came slowly out from the room and her eyes grew vaguely troubled as she stared at the door through which they had gone. Her father looked at her and sighed. Then he fixed his wise old eyes once more upon the fire before him and went on smoking.

Outside Enid and Hale stood in the swirl of the quickening breezes that swept the plateau before the Toll-gate House. The sky was beryl green in the west; the valleys lay a tumbled chaos of black and purple and blue . . . the sigh of innumerable voices was in the air—a faint and plaintive clamor of urgent yet untranslatable tongues. The cold, clean, scentless savor of the hilltops reached their nostrils and the delicate chill of summer

nights among the clouds made Enid shiver lightly.

"Tell me, Mr. Hale," she began quickly, and then she hesitated. The mountaineer was looking at her in a steady, disconcerting sort of way. He bulked big against the evening sky, and with nothing behind him on the horizon line it gave her a queer sense that he was for the moment the only fact of creation. She did not quite know how to go on. But, as he waited, in that still strength of his which thrilled her with its potentialities, she made shift to begin again, more haltingly.

"She—she told me that you were in some sort of trouble."

"Polly?"

She nodded.

"Polly oughtn't to talk," was his comment, accompanied by a frown; she could see it in this open half-light of eventide.

"But you said so yourself, didn't you—or implied it?" Enid went on swiftly, her great eyes pleading and clear. "I *must* know of some way to help! Won't you show me how to help you,—to help you-all?"

It was not altogether her fault that the last word came as an afterthought—even though a hurried one. The man's personality was unmistakably convincing; when she was with him it was paramountly him first of all whom she wished to help. She was not flirting with him; she was merely demonstrating the fact that she was a real woman and he a real man.

Martin Hale hesitated, but it was something the same with him as it had been with Polly; the spell of the golden eyes held him in spite of himself, and drew from him words that he had never meant to utter.

"There's—trouble in the Valley!" he muttered.

"I know that. Is it—a sort of double trouble? Something that calls you there that you don't want to answer to? Is it?"

The man did not answer at once, and she realized that he was sparring for time, and time she would not grant him. She had an inspiration. Hers were not the instincts of Polly, but they were feminine, which is saying something.

In her well-ordered young life she seldom had a chance—a good, full-sized chance—to use her in-

tuitions. Here it seemed was one, and all the adventurous, masked soul of the girl rose to the opportunity of *doing something* at last!

"Mr. Hale," she said, in a lower, but a very different tone, "something is being done—or is going to be done—that is *wrong*. . . . Isn't that true?"

He assented silently.

When she spoke again it was in hushed tones, and yet it came to him like a kind of cry:

"I don't know anything about this situation, and —and—I don't suppose a girl's much good anyway, in times like this! But—I'm going to stick to you people! Somehow I know you're right! And there might be something I could do—I don't know yet——"

Her voice failed her, but she still faced him in the twilight, eager and honest. Martin Hale responded to her instantly and without forethought.

"It's all in a nutshell, Miss Forsythe. Since Polly's told you so much, there's no need hiding a little more. The boys here on the range have something on foot to-night, that Mr. Mason and

I would like to stop if we could. But we're stalled every way."

"If it's anything big——" she broke in.

"It is—big," he answered her. "You see, I'm trusting you."

"Thank you," she said, looking out over the blue-green mist of the shadowed valleys. She was not ironic. It was the finest compliment ever paid her yet. "Go on," she said.

And Martin Hale went on:

"It's going to mean the loss of money to some people, certain sure. And maybe it'll be loss of life to others. I don't know that."

Enid shuddered.

"But," she gasped, "isn't there anything to be done? Oh—I know—I understand—it's dangerous to go back on your friends, but oughtn't real *right* to come first? Oh, *please*!" She was pleading with him, and her voice shook. "Isn't there any way?"

"I—I could tip off the sheriff's gang," he said in a low voice. "I mean that, you know—tip off; just that, and no more. I wouldn't *tell* on a pal anyway!" he ended fiercely.

"But if you could save life and property——"

"I'd do it!" he declared, flinging up his handsome head. "I'd do it, and take my chances afterwards—if I could!"

"And why can't you——"

"Because I haven't a horse! Easy, isn't it?" He laughed bitterly.

"I don't understand!" Enid faltered.

"I tramped over to-day from my own shack," he said, "and if there's any tipping-off to be done, it's got to be quick!"

"But surely they have a horse here!"

Hale laughed, almost angrily.

"A plug! That couldn't do a stiff stretch at a stiff pace even in daylight! No, thanks! I want a real horse. If I were at heart one of—the gang—I don't suppose I'd mind being a horse-thief and I'd have taken Radnor's. But—I won't!"

There was just a moment of breathless waiting. Then Enid turned to him quickly.

"Take mine!" she said.

CHAPTER VII

MOUNTAIN LAUREL

There is rock to the left, and rock to the right, and low lean thorn between,
And ye may hear a breech-bolt snick where never a man is seen,
. . . . . .
There was not a man but carried his feud with the blood of the mountaineer.

RUDYARD KIPLING.

MEANWHILE, Jack Radnor was climbing Gray Crag in quest of mountain laurel for the girl he loved.

Gray Crag certainly presented some interesting exhibits of what Martin Hale had called "stiff climbing." Jack was not an expert mountain climber, though he had done his bit both in Switzerland and the Rockies; but he prided himself upon being able to do whatever any ordinary able-

bodied man could do—not superlatively well, of course, for he was perfectly modest about his own capabilities, but certainly creditably. It first surprised and then annoyed him to find that Gray Crag was the stiffest proposition in the climbing line ever put up to him yet. Then a sort of half-amused, half-grim defiance filled him. Climb Gray Crag, would he? Well, *watch him!*

Climbing Gray Crag was a good deal like walking up a wall, with the added handicap of ledges to which one had to crawl from underneath, and deceptive footholds that were not footholds at all, but shivering, flimsy lumps of sand.

Occasionally a pebble started by his heavy riding boot would rattle off into—silence. Occasionally, the bush or cluster of growing twigs he caught at for his balance came away in his hand, leaving him for the moment slightly sick, as, glancing over his shoulder he saw what lay beneath and behind him. Radnor was very far removed from being a coward, but—he had an imagination.

The fear of high places is, in normally courageous natures, changed to the vital realization of high places. Jack Radnor, climbing, pausing,

working his way up sheer rock walls and jagged granite slabs, had the strange sensation known to aviators and alpine adventurers. He was detached from the world, high above it, spiritually and materially superior to it, and yet—at its mercy. The lower mountains tumbled together in huge and mad disorder, the valleys growing misty with the gathering dusk, the rivers and ponds that he could now only locate by some occasional pin-point of light—they all lay far, far below, mysterious and superbly cruel. He was an atom clinging to a mast a league high, and a hungry ocean waited for him.

Once, a great bird winged past him with a rush and startled cry, and his hold nearly loosened. Luckily, he had an unusually steady head and had never been dizzy in his life.

After a century or so, he pulled himself up to an inconceivably narrow summit, and, drenched and aching, threw himself down to rest.

Over him the blue sky was turning to violet. A faint rose glow was stealing into it—a tint reflected in the blooming masses about him. For he had found the mountain laurel—there was no question about that. As he lay at full length he

reached out a lazy hand and pulled a cluster of the tiny pink cups to his face: they had the fresh, cool earthy fragrance of all wild flowers. After a minute he rose and gathered an armful of the lovely things.

And then he started, for at the root of the laurel shrubs lay a revolver—a heavy and old weapon, which had seen service.

It was growing dark, and he knew he must hurry; for going down would be far harder and more risky than climbing up. So he wasted no time in cogitation, but slipped the gun into his pocket. It was too good to leave it behind where it would get rusted by night dews. He could find out later to whom it belonged.

He paused on that remote pinnacle and looked at the deepening glory in the west, and thought of Enid. He was not given to praying, but his thoughts at that moment were not very much unlike a prayer—a man's prayer addressed to the sort of Creator who made both men and women.

Then, with his laurel burden, he began the descent.

The air of the hills had suddenly grown cool and almost sharp. Scents and sounds, as is their way in mountain atmosphere, came out emphatically, fixing themselves poignantly upon the perceptions. Until that moment, it seemed to Radnor, all impressions had been merged into one mystic blend; now all at once he caught odors and echoes that he had not noticed in the equalizing light of day. Does night really raise the pitch, increase the vibration of all things?

He was walking under crowding, stooping trees, the perfume of which, wildwood-like and eloquent, made a scent-music in his ears. Low rustlings spoke to his heart as actual vision might have done. The senses, by being raised to their power, became interchangeable at will. The whole world was awake, and living so keenly that his own blood pounded in response.

And at that moment he found himself confronted by a group of men still visible in the twilight, one of whom, tall, slim, and muscular, came toward him with an upraised hand.

"Hold on a moment," he said, and the voice sounded vaguely familiar, though Jack could not

place it. "What are you up to on this trail tonight?"

"What the——" Jack brought up short, and instinctively dug his hand into his breeches pocket.

"We've the drop," spoke up one of the men behind the leader. "Don't get fresh."

"We shall have to search you," said the slim stranger, advancing.

"Like hell you will!" rejoined Jack hotly. He had released his hold on the revolver in his pocket; now he flung aside his armful of laurel, and stood ready.

The slim young man promptly jumped for him.

"Thank the Lord!" said Jack with devout fury, and grappled. He did know something about wrestling, but so, it seemed, did his assailant. The men stood about in a very sportsmanlike fashion, without interfering, and after a stiff little scrimmage, Radnor succeeded in throwing his adversary.

The man, stumbling to his feet, advanced with an outstretched hand.

"I've an idea," he said, "there are only a few

fellows that know that particular hold, and—if someone would just give us a light——"

But already Jack had recognized him. It was Judge Denby's son.

"Ralph, by all the gods!"

Jack had known Ralph Denby since early Groton days; they had been at Harvard together, though in different classes, and their fathers were old friends. Ralph was about Radnor's height, but a year or so younger and slighter. He was, as he had always been, a trained athlete, and Jack remarked ruefully, "Hang you, you haven't forgotten that old fall of yours, have you?"

Both men stood back and laughed at each other, though both were breathing heavily. Then Jack picked up his flowers, and Ralph turned to his troop of followers:

"It's all right; it's a mistake."

The others laughed, too, and then, as they all swung down the trail together, Ralph Denby said:

"What on earth brings you here, anyway, at this hour?"

"Mountain laurel!" answered Radnor, laughing again.

He was amazed at the effect of this simple statement.

"Mountain laurel!" repeated young Denby, and stopped short in the trail. "See here, are you——"

Jack interrupted him with some irritation.

"Really I can't see why you should make such an ass of yourself, Denby! I came up here to get some laurel for Enid——"

"On the level?"

It was too dark by now to be sure, but Radnor felt that his friend's eyes were on him in searching fashion. In the twilight he flushed.

"What I say usually is," he rejoined stiffly.

Ralph seemed to relax, and put his hand on his arm.

"That goes, Jack!" he said, in a different tone. "You see, I'm deputy sheriff for the night——"

"The devil you are!"

"Yes! And old Heaton has put me on the job of patrolling some of these trails. There's something in the wind, and we want to get a line on it before they get started."

"Just who are 'they'?"

"These mountain chaps—the fellows who go in for moonshining, and road-agenting, and——"

"And supplying the moving-picture business with material!" said Jack. "I know! Don't believe in them myself."

"I'm not sure that I don't," said Denby. "The governor says there's a lot of lawlessness up here."

"Well, your father ought to know."

"You bet he ought, and you bet he does! As a Judge, he can't do very much himself, you understand, but has to depend on Sheriff Heaton, and I, if you please, am run in on the job! I don't know exactly what they think is on for to-night, but orders have been pretty strict. Where are you going, by the bye?"

"To meet Enid at the Toll Gate," returned Jack, who had just paused at the crossing of the trails.

Ralph Denby whistled softly.

"There's a den of thieves, if you like!" he said. "At least, that's the reputation of Four Trails. A sort of rounding-up place for all the mountain thugs and blacklegs. Well—take care of your-

self, and good-night to you—you and your mountain laurel!"

"You've left me some nice-looking specimens of it!" remarked Radnor resentfully. "We must have walked on it, up there!"

Even in the dusk it was obvious that the flowers had been crushed, as well as wilted.

"Sorry!" said Denby, heartlessly. "My regards to Miss Forsythe. All right, boys."

He went off with his men, and the lot of them disappeared in the dimness of the overhanging, perfumed trees.

Within thirty feet, Radnor was challenged again.

"Hands up!" said some one.

"Not so you'd notice it!" exclaimed Jack, who was beginning to feel thoroughly wrathful. He pulled the recently acquired revolver from his pocket. "I'm armed, so you can come on and fire, and be damned to you!" Then, as no one accepted the invitation, he added: "This looks to me like some sort of joke, and a confoundedly bad one. What on earth do you want me for, anyway?"

One of the men, only a shadow in the darkness, came forward.

"Name and password, please!"

"Not on your life!"

There was a sound of muttered laughter at this. Whatever else they were, these various hold-up men seemed of a genial disposition.

"Where are you going?" was the next question. It was pacifically given, but Radnor wanted to retort "None of your business." Instead, however, he merely said, resignedly:

"See here, my affairs appear to be very much more interesting to you than to me, this evening. So let's save time by having the full particulars. My name is John Worth Radnor, of New York—at present, of Warm Sulphur Springs, and——"

"Cut all that."

"With pleasure! I am at this moment supposed to be taking a ride."

The laughter was unrestrained this time.

"Where's the horse?" some one demanded.

"Hold on a moment! I'm trying to tell you. The horse is at Four Trail Crossing, the Toll

Gate, where I am going as soon as you get through asking me questions."

"Four Trail Crossing!"

The exclamation was general and deep, and there was no laughter in it.

"That's different," said the man who had spoken first.

He walked up to Jack, struck a match and scrutinized him closely. His inspection was brief, but Radnor felt as though he had never been looked over so thoroughly. The investigator was a small man, with a noticeably brown and wrinkled face. Now as he frowned in a puzzled way, his skin seemed to form in a hundred creases, and he seemed like a gnome.

"May I have a look at that gun of yours, stranger?" he said.

"Certainly!" replied Radnor with exaggerated politeness.

A second match light flung the out-held revolver into sharp relief, and for the first time Jack saw engraved upon it the initials "M. H."

One of the other men, phantom-like among the trees, spoke at the same instant:

"What's that you're carrying—beside the gun?"

And another added quickly.

"Any one to vouch for you in the Valley?"

"I can only answer one question at a time," said Jack, who was becoming more at ease in the general madness of the adventure. "What I am carrying, besides the revolver, which I should very much like to have back, by the bye, if you don't mind—ah, thanks!—is mountain laurel. Probably the best known man in the Valley will answer for me—Judge Denby—and see that you answer, too, if necessary," he added significantly. "Anything else you would like to know, gentlemen?"

"Nothing else at all," said the small leader, thoughtfully. "A date at Four Trail Crossing, Martin Hale's gun, mountain laurel, and—Judge Denby—" he paused just a second—"are good enough for us!"

"Are you more of Heaton's men?" demanded Radnor.

"Not a chance," returned his latest challenger, in an amused tone. "Don't you worry a mite, stranger; we're with you! Good-night and good luck!"

For the first *time Jack saw engraved* upon it the initials "M. H."

They melted into the odorous darkness, as noiselessly as they had appeared, and Radnor put his hand to his head, wondering whether he had dreamed them entirely.

Four Trail Crossing—Martin Hale—these things seemed natural enough in combination. Mountain laurel, as he saw clearly enough now, was evidently the password for the night. But where did Judge Denby come in? What was his connection with this mysterious outlaw company?

With his head very full of conjectures that were but the baseless fabric of dreams after all, and irritated him by their absurdity and unreality, he tramped around a bend and came in sight of the Toll-gate House.

With his arms filled with the dawn-pink blooms set in the darkness of their glossy leaves—and they were still lovely in spite of their adventures!—he went along the little rocky trail that led to the Toll Gate at Four Trail Crossing.

And against a beryl sky he saw Enid, standing crisply outlined with a big, splendidly proportioned form bending before her. Martin Hale was kissing her hands, first one and then the other.

For one moment, Jack thought of hurling him into the gorge below; then of hurling his trophies in the same direction. But something harder in him sent him into the Toll-gate House; just, in fact, as Enid entered by another door.

He did not even look at her, but walked straight to Polly Mason.

"I'm afraid," he said, in that gentle, courteous way that was so new to her and so seductive, "that you have too many of these as it is, and—they are rather tired-looking, aren't they? But they've had quite a bit of a trip. You see, I went to Gray Crag this afternoon, and found these; and I thought perhaps—wilted as they are—that you would accept these few extra ones—just as a very great favor to a stranger."

CHAPTER VIII

ENID IS LEFT BEHIND

Ladies, like variegated Tulips, show;
'Tis to their Changes half their charms we owe. . . .
—ALEXANDER POPE.

"ARE you ready to go home now?" Jack asked formally, turning at last toward Enid.

Her small face was colorless and her golden eyes were flames. A thing of fire she seemed; she almost burned him with the look of her.

"No," she answered, in a level tone. "I do not expect to be ready for some time."

Jack Radnor stood and looked at her. Polly and her father had moved away, and were talking together in low tones.

"I quite understand your willingness to stay in this charming place," said Jack, with fiendish

politeness—fiendish because neither of the others was listening, and he knew it. "But—"

She interrupted him with a blazing look even more golden.

"I've noticed that you find it charming!" she snapped.

Jack raised his eyebrows, smiling slightly.

"You have the advantage of me there," he said. "I personally have been here such a very short time that, of course, I am no real judge."

"One can judge some things very quickly!" she flared at him, detesting herself for feeling sick and shaky all over as she spoke.

"Yes," Radnor said quietly. "I have noticed that. But what I am trying to get at at present is this: why should you spend so much time here now, when it is so entirely easy to come back whenever you like?"

"I can't walk all the way," she remarked, and turned her head away.

Jack Radnor was frankly bewildered.

"But your horse—" he began.

"Martin Hale has him!" she said sharply, and fell again silent.

"Martin Hale!"

Jack stared at the back of her yellow head blankly, then he said in rather a low, restrained tone:

"What happened?"

Silence.

"Where has Martin Hale gone with your horse?" he went on.

"I can't tell you."

"You'll have to!"

"I won't!"

Radnor thought rapidly. If Enid had indeed been idiot enough to lend Hale her horse for some nefarious and secret doings, the question resolved itself into something close to simplicity.

"Then you'll have to go back on my mount, postilion-wise," he said, without attempting to argue.

Enid turned upon him and he nearly recoiled before the fury in her eyes.

"I wouldn't ride postilion-wise with you—to Heaven!" she declared; and there was no doubt that she meant it.

Mason and his daughter approached at this point.

"If you want to go back to Warm Sulphur Springs, you'll have to go alone!" proceeded Enid.

Again Jack thought. There were two bands of fairly unceremonious men upon the range that night. He himself had encountered them. Could he take the chance of putting Enid's saddle upon Champion, and trusting her alone down those dark and mysterious ways?

Unexpectedly, the old Toll Keeper came to his rescue.

"What's the trouble, sir, if I may ask?"

"The lady has lost her horse," said Jack, too angry to be diplomatic.

"Lost her—" Richard Mason's expression was so astounded that Jack exonerated him from any complicity in whatever was on foot. It made him, strangely enough, the more enraged against his fiancée.

"The problem is simply of getting her to the Valley," he went on.

"There isn't any way by which I'll go to the Valley!" said Enid, with her eyes flashing.

The Masons were people of few words, and rapid understandings.

"Why don't you leave her here with us, sir?" he said.

And Polly came quickly to Enid, and put her arm around her waist.

Jack's eyes searched the older man's deeply.

"It's all right, sir," Mason said, with a smile that would have reassured any one. "We'll look after her, Polly and I."

Radnor drew a deep breath.

After all, he had to trust them; there was no other way that he could see. And surely Enid would be safe here, with an old man of Mason's sterling type, and a girl like Polly.

"All right," he said briefly. "Thanks. I won't be long." He swung about and looked at Enid.

"I'm going," he said casually.

Enid did not even turn around.

"Good-night," she said, and he could not see that her face was working inexplicably. "I suppose I'll see you in the morning, some time?"

Radnor laughed, not particularly pleasantly.

"You'll see me to-night," he said. "I'm merely

going down to the hotel to set your mother's mind at rest and to get you another horse. It ought not to take me more than two or three hours. You can't get rid of me as easily as all that—not to-night at least. To-morrow you may do just what you like. But I am going to get you a horse first —and believe me, you won't be able to give this one away so easily as you did the other."

He turned to their hosts, shook Mason's hand hard, and bowed low over Polly's. In another minute he had gone.

"Say," said the Toll Keeper, gazing after him in a way that was almost affectionate, "I could love that boy!"

But neither Polly nor Enid said anything at all.

The door closed on Jack, and no one spoke. A sound in the stable sent old Mason out to help. Still no words in the Toll-gate House. The two girls stood motionless, without facing each other, without addressing each other.

A rattle and rush of hoofs, a shout of farewell from the Toll Keeper; then came his boisterous entrance, which somehow seemed to break a sort of spell.

Jack Radnor was galloping down the trail when Enid, suddenly transformed into a young fury, confronted the father and daughter in the center of the room.

For the time being she appeared to have gone mad, and to have completely forgotten where she was and who were listening to what she said.

It was of Jack that she spoke; savage, eternally feminine sentences, panted, gasped, broken by heaving pauses more eloquent than any of the most fluent words. And now and again tears rained down her white face—tears that instinctively one knew must burn and sear her as they fell.

"And he said that he loved me!" she breathed, first very low—and then her voice rose to a harsh and strident key. "Love me! And he could leave me like this! He could talk as though I were something to be carried about—a copy of a woman, just as he is a copy of a man!" She turned furiously upon Polly, who, being of frailer fiber, in spite of her appearance, shrank toward her father. "He gave you *my* flowers!" she gasped, with that strange yellow blaze in her eyes.

"Mine, do you hear? That *I* wanted! He gave them to you! He——"

The mountain girl was frankly terrified, but the old man seemed to sense some emotion that was not unfamiliar. He put his daughter aside with a big, gentle hand, and went up to the half-crazed girl.

"What's it all about?" he asked, in the soft, great, rumbling tones that bring such rest to women. "You love him, and you think that he doesn't love you? Is that it?"

"Love me!" shrilled Enid. "He doesn't know how to love; it isn't in him. He—oh,—" She seemed to stretch upward like a thin gleaming flame, until one wondered whether she were not a living column of fire. "I hate him!" she cried desperately. "I hate him!—I hate him!"

She dropped in a heap on the floor.

"Poor little kid!" said the Toll Keeper gently, looking down at her.

"She doesn't appreciate him!" said his daughter hotly. But she was on her knees beside the unconscious girl, and was loosening her high white riding stock, even as she spoke.

It was an odd paradox that the very faults which Enid found with Jack recommended him the more strongly to Polly. The mistake which Enid had made in believing him a bloodless sort of automaton, was in time to bring Polly into risks which neither of them were likely to take into account,—for the time being at all events.

Enid moved, breathed deeply, opened her great yellow eyes, and stared wonderingly at the faces of the Toll Keeper and his daughter.

At this moment, a rap sounded on the door, and without waiting for a response, a large, red-and-white-haired, sloppy-looking woman of the hills entered. She was dressed in a sort of sordid and squalid finery that did not particularly harmonize with her fat, rather vacant yellowish face and supermature figure.

"Dear, dear! What's wrong here?" she exclaimed in a kind of heavy consternation, lumbering forward.

Polly scowled and retreated. She detested the Widow Short, their nearest neighbor. She was convinced that she had designs on her father, and she knew that Mrs. Short was one of the most

shiftless of female mortals. But widows and widowers have a way of drifting together in the high ranges. Polly foresaw but dreaded the day when Mrs. Short, and her slovenly efforts towards finery and her lackadaisical Southern ways, should enter the Toll-gate House as its mistress.

Had she only known it, she need not have worried in the least; but she was not subtle enough to recognize that her father was more amused than anything else by their neighbor's cumbrous attempts at personal ornamentation,—always of the cheapest and most unsuitable sort. Polly thought it horrid of him to so ostentatiously mention the widow's pea-green hair-ribbons and pink belt in combination. It *was* horrid of him, as a matter of fact, too, though not in any sense that Mrs. Short (or Polly either) could appreciate. Richard Mason was one of those rare, delightful and intrinsically demoralizing creatures who can enjoy making fun of others without giving the fact away.

Mrs. Short and Polly helped Enid into Polly's bedroom and onto the bed, and, as though utterly exhausted by her abnormally acute emotions, Enid

sank back upon the pillows almost, it seemed, lifeless.

"She's real pretty, ain't she?" said Mrs. Short, gazing down at the clearly cut little features. Polly's eyes were dark and deep, as, after a moment, she answered:

"Yes; she is."

Her father's voice called her to the other room, and Mason said to her in a low voice:

"Now that Mrs. Short is here, I don't mind so much leaving you two girls here alone."

"Alone!"

"Yes! I've an idea that Mart has gone out to help out this mess somehow, and I don't want to—" he hesitated.

Polly was just enough like him to laugh.

"To miss anything?" she suggested.

Mason laughed, too, and hugged her. "That's it! I won't go far, but——"

"Dad, dear," she entreated, "you know that you've had two or three attacks of your heart lately! You will be careful?"

"You bet I will! I'm not going to get mixed up in anything, only,—I cannot just stay at home

like a rusty gun! Look out for that little girl, Poll! She's worth it, if I'm not mistaken."

He kissed her, took his rifle from the wall, and went out with his swinging step. Polly followed him anxiously with her eyes. His heart *had* acted badly of late, and she hated to see him go out into the night alone, especially when times were hazardous, like these. She made a move as though to follow him, for—after all,—she adored him more than anything in the world; but Mrs. Short's voice stopped her from the door of the bedroom.

"She wants you," she said, almost unctuously, the tone was so kind. "The sweet, pretty young things wants you! I've got to be getting home. I've loaves in the oven, and Lord knows what has happened to them by this time! Good-night, dearie!"

Polly politely evaded the caress that accompanied the adieu; she felt that if the Widow Short should ever by chance kiss her she should die.

Mrs. Short departed, and, with a curious sense of dread about her that she could not explain to herself, Polly went in to Enid.

She had spent many lonely hours at the Toll

Gate before this, but never before had she known this sense of isolation, of—was it, could it be dread? She and the Valley girl were alone on the mountain top, evil things were abroad, and the old wooden clock in the living-room was ticking out the hour of nine.

Nine is not a late hour in cities, but among the peaks,—Polly went forward to the bed to meet Enid's worried eyes as tranquilly as might be.

The girl on the bed put a question which was curiously disconcerting:

"Is everything all right?" she said.

CHAPTER IX

THE HOLD-UP

Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace,
Profaners of this neighbor-stained steel,—
Will they not hear? What, ho! you men, you beasts,
. . . From those bloody hands
Throw your mistemper'd weapons to the ground. . . .

—SHAKESPEARE.

DOWN the steep, zig-zag trail, Jack Radnor urged Champion, with the sighing mountain winds, chill and strange-savored, in his face as he rode. The night is always alive—more alive than by day—but this night seemed to the young man more instinct with vitality, potentialities, sounds and suggestions and stirrings that he could give no name to, than any that he had yet experienced. Two or three times he could have sworn that he heard stealthy footsteps on the trail

and in the close-packed shrubbery on either side. More than once some echo came to him as he halted on a precipitous, open space to get his bearings, which was not so very unlike a human voice. But he knew that the hills are deceptive, and that sounds are magnified, diminished and transformed even more trickily than on the water. Also, he knew that he was in a highly wrought mood, and had too much sense to trust his own senses! If Liberty Ridge and the trail that led down from it seemed more alive and more busy than would be normal on a late summer evening, he was content to put it down to his own imagination.

But one or two things happened that he could not attribute to fancy; horsemen passed him on the trail, in evident haste. And once, at least, he heard a distant sound that could only have been a shot. The sound reminded him of the fact that he still carried Martin Hale's revolver in his pocket. And he fell to conjecturing what business Martin Hale might have so urgent that he was obliged to borrow Enid Forsythe's horse for the purpose of seeing it through. He could not very well help trying to piece together all the little

things, trifling in themselves, which had gone to make up a rather puzzling evening.

And then conjecture ceased for the time, and recognition of something very wrong somewhere, took its place in his mind.

He was riding along a part of the trail which slanted along the mountainside overlooking the Valley. The trees below him happened to be somewhat scanty just there, and he could see far down the gorge, beyond the Warm Sulphur Springs colony, beyond the railway station, beyond the livery stables, the switchback, even the last stiffly graded turn of the little railway line. It was well after nine, he knew, and the evening train from Covington was long overdue, but delays were common enough up there, where there were no other trains to connect with on schedule time, and where even a slight wash-out might put the track out of commission for quite a bit. But there was the train, as surely as he was sitting on Champion's back, and it was standing still, and—he had descended a third of the mountainside, so could see clearly enough,—there were one or two inexplicable flashes along its length,—espe-

cially at that end of it where he knew must be the engine.

Then and then only did his formless suspicions and intuitions take forcible shape.

"By God, that's it!" he exclaimed aloud. "They're holding up the train!"

Champion had never felt spurs from this peculiar rider before, but he felt them now, and bounded forward with a startled violence that nearly sent them both down into the gorge; for the trail was at no point a very ample one, and notably narrow just there. Radnor sat as far back in his saddle as he could, gave the horse his head, and told him to "Go like hell!"

Which Champion did. He had been a real horse in his day, before an impoverished Englishman sold him to the Warm Sulphur Springs livery concern to cover a big bill. Two or three years of bad hack riding had saddle-galled him, and put him a little out of condition, but Jack Radnor had been riding him all summer, and he had recovered nearly all his old spirit and efficiency. He could still go like hell when occasion demanded it, and when the man whom he had by this time accepted

as his master gave him to understand that speed was what was wanted of him, he gathered himself together and tore down the steep dark trail at a breakneck pace.

"God love you, old fellow!" praised Jack Radnor, leaning well back, and clinching with his knees so that there should not even be any extra drag on the stirrups, "I only hope and pray that you don't break your knees, nor get let down for all time!"

Champion was sure-footed, and he had a good horse's pride in those slack reins and stirrups. His god trusted to his making it, and he should not trust in vain. Most of the way it was too dark to see the path, and Radnor wondered just when the two of them would go over a cliff or turn a somersault. Once Champion stumbled, almost stopped, and Jack felt the big muscles gathering under his leg-grip. The next moment Champion rose clean in the air, jumped not one but three fallen logs across the trail, recovered himself gallantly, and stretched himself again to that racking downgrade gallop.

Another open part showed the train again, and

now it was lit by a lurid light that flickered against the dark.

"The damned cowards!" said Radnor through his teeth, "they're scaring the passengers out of the cars, by setting the train on fire. Hurry, old chap,—hurry! Let's have all that's in you!"

They were nearing the bottom now, and there was one mad chance that Radnor could take. Champion had done all and more than any horse could do; now, he gathered up the reins once more, and, to his mount's bewilderment,—he was getting countless surprises to-night, was Champion,—swung him off the trail straight down the mountainside to the road that led through the Valley.

Champion, in his day, had made some rough runs, but he had never encountered anything like this. It is nerve-breaking for a horse to go at full speed downhill; but when to that is added the hazard of hillock and gulch, fallen tree, and clutter of undergrowth, sudden dips and falls, and sharp rises that have to be scrambled over somehow at expense to temper, patience and legs,—

then the thing becomes torture to mount and man alike.

Champion fell once, and though he was not hurt badly,—only a strained muscle,—and Radnor had flung clear of the saddle in time, he was deeply ashamed. But there was no leisure for stopping; they must go on,—on, both of them, sliding down sandslopes, splashing through unexpected mountain streams, leaping hummocks, breasting stinging thickets of trees, until they reached open level ground, and under the stars the Valley was about them. The hills they had left behind.

They were almost exactly at the crossing of the two broad roadways, one leading from Warm Sulphur Springs, one from the stables and stations and so on, onto what was generally called the Warm Springs Highway.

A horseman galloped at full speed up from the lower road and, passing Jack, threw his horse into the tangle of shrubbery at the base of the mountain. There were shots in the near distance, and more galloping hoofs. Then, as Radnor paused to consider what he would best do, a little

band of men rode past him at racing pace, and fled into the starlit dark.

A man on foot, and hurrying and muttering to himself, came stumbling along.

"For God's sake, what's happened?" demanded Jack.

"The train!" panted the other. "They've held it up, and there's a lot of stuff stolen!" He ran on, with uncertain steps.

Jack wasted no more time, but spurred Champion on, and took the triangle of darkened grass between the two roads at one great leap.

"Now for it!" he said, bending his head close to the horse's, after a curious friendly fashion all his own. "If there's anything doing we want to be there, don't we?"

Bruised and stiff as he was, Champion managed to fling up his head with a sort of noble defiance, and raced toward the stables. He knew now where he was going, but it did not enlighten him much. All that he thought of, dear horse, was that it was needful to get there quickly.

In a rush of forced speed, Jack and Champion

found themselves in the thick of another rush of action that demanded instant participation.

A struggling mob, lighted now and again by the flashes of gunplay, surrounded the forward end of the train. He heard men cursing and, he thought, a woman crying. In the blaze of flame that he dashed into, the first face he recognized was that of Ralph Denby.

They knew each other immediately this time, and both cried:

"You!"

"What is it, anyway?" demanded Radnor. He found difficulty in holding Champion still. In spite of his hard trip, the horse felt that he had found himself, and having gotten, as it were, his second wind, was mad to be off and doing again.

"The blackguards have fired the train and gotten away with God knows how much!" said Ralph, bitterly. "What are you doing here? We only just arrived,—too late, of course!"

"I saw the fire from the mountain," said Jack. "Hush, boy, hush!" he added to the restless and heroic Champion. "Do you mean to say that they've all gotten away?"

"But," exclaimed Ralph mystified, "I thought you were with Miss Forsythe,—gotten away, by Gad! Look at that!"

He wheeled his horse and was off after a fleeing figure like lightning. Jack followed.

Then a curious thing happened. The man who was riding away from them turned in his saddle and shot. The bullet went wide, but Denby answered it instantly, and Jack, acting on an instinct as old as man, pulled Hale's revolver from his pocket and fired also. The escaping horse stumbled and fell; both Radnor and Ralph fired again, as they saw the rider leap and start for the woods. The man stumbled, evidently hit, but in another moment had made his get-away among the clumps of fir-trees, so hard to explore in that light.

Ralph suddenly wheeled his horse, and said sharply:

"Here, Jack, this is none of your funeral! Get back there and look after Alice!"

"Alice! Is Miss Baker in that pandemonium?"

Ralph half-groaned and said: "Yes! I didn't even know she was on the train;—it must have

been a sudden plan on her part. I thought she was going North for a house party. But she's back there right enough,—I saw her. I can't leave my job, so—you're in charge, old man!"

"Right!" returned his friend, briefly, and turned his horse's head.

He knew that Denby was in love with Alice Baker, and that he had been paid a full-fledged compliment by being sent to look out for her.

Ralph, with a curt good-bye called over his shoulder, tore off up the road, and Jack rode back to the scene of confusion below the switchback.

The fire was out, and traps had arrived from the Springs stable to take the guests up to the hotel. But there was still lamentation among the women and profanity among the men. The engine driver was trying to mop up the blood on his face with a greasy black cloth and cursing with a steady fluency and an imaginative variety which would be well worth listening to if Jack had had the time to stop.

He rode past him and the little groups of men, who, gesticulating furiously, were trying to explain

to each other just what ought to have been done and wasn't.

He found Alice Baker, a tall, dark girl dashingly dressed, in the most towering rage he had ever seen a woman.

"Isn't there a single man in this crowd?" she exclaimed. "It doesn't look so!—Mr. Radnor! I didn't see you! Isn't it outrageous? They stood around and let the women be robbed,—actually stood and looked on!"

"Well, my dear young lady," deprecatingly said a sallow little millionaire who had lost about six hundred dollars in the mix-up, "they were pointing guns at us, you know,—and as they seemed to be in a highly excited condition, I feel sure that any sudden action on our part might have made some of those guns go off!"

"What of it?" cried Alice Baker so vehemently that her hat fell off. "I should think you'd rather have been killed than——"

"But we wouldn't have been a bit more good to you dead than alive," said the little millionaire, mildly.

"Did they get much from you, Miss Baker?"

asked Radnor, picking up the hat. He hoped that putting it on might distract her mind, but it seemed to infuriate her the more.

"They took my two lovely pearl hatpins!" she declared tragically. "And twenty-five dollars, and my dressing case with a lot of little things,—that little emerald brooch Enid gave me was among them,—and—and I can't even keep my hat on!"

Jack burst out laughing, and after staring at him in cold anger for half a minute, she broke down and laughed, too.

"It's all over but the shouting, anyway, Miss Baker," he said. "Come up to the hotel and let's do the shouting there."

She and the sallow little millionaire got into a carriage which had just been driven up and Jack rode beside them up the road that followed the track.

"This," said Alice, "is what I get for coming to see my dearest friend unexpectedly! But I'm glad I came anyway. I'm crazy to see Enid. I suppose she'll have heard about the hold-up and be anxious."

"Enid," said Jack, "is at the present moment about ten miles from here, on the top of the mountain."

"For heaven's sake, what's she doing there?"

"At present, waiting for me," he returned, half-laughing.

"And in that case, what are *you* doing *here?*"

"Holding down Ralph's job!" said Jack, low and audaciously.

"Ralph!" he heard her exclaim under her breath. "Why doesn't he hold it down himself?" she demanded, with spirit.

"He's chasing bandits."

She sniffed scornfully.

"He'd better," she said. "There's a garnet and pearl Harvard stick-pin he gave me among the loot! But—is he in any danger, Mr. Radnor?"

"Lots!" rejoined Jack cheerfully. "There, that serves you right, Miss Baker, for losing your temper!"

"*What* served me right?"

"The shock you got when I said 'lots!'—Nonsense! Of course, it was a shock: I heard you gasp!—Here we are at the hotel!"

They were, in fact, drawing up in front of the hotel, the great white-pillared veranda of which was crowded with excited guests awaiting the adventure-scared travelers. Bell boys ran down the broad steps, and anxious voices called down incoherent questions.

Jack dismounted, helped Alice out, and followed her as she ran up the steps, and into Mrs. Forsythe's embrace.

"My dear girl! I've been frightened to death. We heard the shooting and they telephoned up from the station—but you must be dead!—Jack Radnor! Thank goodness! I thought something awful had happened to you and Enid, too. Really, I have been at my wits' ends. Why didn't she come up from the court with you?"

Her fair face grew quite pale. "There's nothing the matter?" she asked quickly.

He hastened to reassure her, and to explain as well as he could in a few words. Then he went off to order two other horses, one to lead bridled but unsaddled. Enid would use no saddle but her own, and that was in the Toll-gate barn.

As he turned to start again down the steps, he

met Judge Denby, dignified, handsome and kindly as ever, coming up them. The Judge looked grave and troubled.

"What's all this?" he said to Radnor. "There appears to have been another outbreak among these lawless creatures of the hills! Was there really a hold-up?"

"There certainly was! Ralph is out with the Sheriff's posse now. Surely, you knew."

The Judge nodded.

"I knew that. Heaton told me there had been ransoms, but really, this is quite unexpected! To hold up the Millionaire's Local! Such a thing has never happened before in my experience!"

"Well, it seems to have been easy enough," said Jack. "The wonder is no one ever thought of doing it before."

"Do you know," said Judge Denby, seriously, "that is quite true? I really do wonder that no one ever thought of doing it before!"

Jack started to pass him, paused, opened his lips to speak, then closed them again.

"What were you going to say?" asked the Judge, eying him keenly.

"Nothing," said Jack, shaking his head and smiling. "At least, nothing now. I'm in a bit of a hurry! See you later, sir."

He ran down the steps, asking himself what had stopped him from demanding why the outlaws of the mountains had shown so much respect for Judge Denby's name.

The horses were in the court almost as soon as he was, and three minutes later he was cantering along the Warm Sulphur Springs highway, toward the lower end of the trail that led up to the Toll-gate House.

As he turned on to the softer soil of the bridle path and slowed up for the ascent, he was startled to hear a sound, unmistakable and inevitably disturbing to normal human hearing—the moan of some one in great distress or pain. It came from the ink-black shrubbery that edged the trail and in the darkness seemed a veritable cry for help. Jack reined up sharply and listened.

CHAPTER X

MIDNIGHT ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP

> And we will talk, until thought's melody
> Become too sweet for utterance, and it die
> In words, to live again in looks, which dart
> With thrilling tone into the voiceless heart,
> Harmonizing silence without a sound.
>
> —PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

WHEN Enid asked her if everything was all right, Polly experienced a quick sense of comfort,—undoubted comfort, though unaccountable. The alien girl of the valleys had somehow divined the element of uneasiness that tinged the atmosphere of the Toll-gate House that night. Polly knew that by her voice, her eyes, by a certain steady alertness of manner that suggested a prepared apprehension, a reasoning appreciation of possibilities that, however foreign to her, she was still able to recognize.

"All right?" she repeated, half-smiling, in a sort of oddly relaxed way. "Why, I suppose so! Only——"

She laughed outright. The other girl had become, if only for the moment, a comrade. "One never knows just what-all's going to happen up here!" she confessed. "I reckon nothing much'll turn up, only—there's a right-smart lot of trouble doing to-night and Four Trails is a mighty handy place to stop off at!"

She laughed again, her dark eyes frankly appreciative of the danger and adventure in which she habitually lived, moved and breathed. Then her tanned, lovely young face grew sober.

"Dad's gone off," she said, hesitatingly. "He got sort of upset, wondering how things were going, and seemed like he had to go. I—I feel sort of worried about him. His heart's queer, and he oughtn't to be running about at night, alone."

There was real trouble in her voice. Enid responded to it by starting up with vigor.

"Why on earth didn't you go with him?" she demanded, almost indignantly.

"Well—" Polly was rather at a loss as to how to put it. "You were here, and——"

"Polly Mason!" exclaimed the other, without ceremony. "If you dare to say that you let your father go off alone on my account——"

"He wouldn't have let me go with him anyhow," the mountain girl put in hastily. "He hates being watched, and babied, and that sort of thing. But if I could have kind of followed, and—and——"

"Well," declared Enid, with decision, standing up and arranging her hair with firm little hands, "you're going to go off and 'kind of follow' him right away, do you hear? And I'll go with you."

But of this Polly would not hear. If she did go, if Enid should insist on her going (which Enid accordingly did) she should go alone. Enid would be quite safe in the Toll-gate House,—if she weren't afraid just of 'the lonesomeness.' Polly admitted that it *was* lonesome there at night sometimes. But Enid stoutly declared that she wasn't the least bit afraid. She would sit by the fire in the living room and wait for Polly to come home.

"And mind you bring your father with you when you do come!" she commanded her.

So Polly set out in the windy dark and Enid, after watching her off through the shadows that seemed to crowd threateningly close to the Toll-gate House, closed the door upon them and came back to the fire to listen to the old wooden clock ticking off the hours, and to think a vast number of brand-new thoughts.

And so engrossed was she in these meditations of hers that she could not have said how long nor how short a time had elapsed before she heard a step outside the house, and a hand upon the latch.

She almost screamed in swift terror, but the moment of panic was short-lived for the door swung open promptly and disclosed to her the big figure of Martin Hale framed against the night. The quiet of the lamp-lit, fire-lit room which had made her feel oddly safe a minute before suddenly became only a stage setting to throw out, by contrast, the almost terribly splendid personality of the man who had come so unexpectedly to encroach upon her midnight vigil.

The fate of the Lady of Shalott was a romantic

one, take it all in all. She could not, to be sure, taste of the fullness or joy of life, but she had two great blessings: she had no sense of humor, and she could be just as sentimental as she liked. These are boons denied to the modern, all-round girl.

Enid would have loved, just once in a while, to be in a romantic situation, even if it were a tragically romantic one, and, best of all, to be able to give her mind to it without seeing its absurdity. But so far, much as she had thirsted for passionate sentiment a perverse imp inside her mind had ridiculed every possibility as it had come up. And anyway, modern life is against that sort of thing, whatever your personal inclinations. I wonder if the Lady of Shalott wasn't happier at her mirror and spinning wheel than Enid was in playing golf and bridge, riding, wearing pretty clothes, and generally enjoying the comfortable realities of existence?

At all events when she confronted Martin Hale in the lonely Toll-gate House with the winds whispering outside and not another sound save the ticking of the clock, she felt as though Romance—

Adventure—the Fairy Tale element—were for the first time beckoning to her. Not that she loved Jack less, nor that she loved Martin more either—but she was young, secretly emotional (which is the most dangerous way to be emotional), and, being furious with Jack, ripe to be attracted by another man. Or perhaps it would be fairer to say attracted by the possibilities of being alone with another man. She did not mean to flirt with Martin Hale, but she had a latent wish that he would try to make love to her—in a very respectful fashion, of course—or at least, want to, and—show it.

In short, she was preparing to engage in the time-honored game called 'Playing with Fire.'

He came forward slowly, looming huge in the lamplight. Heavens, how big the man was, and how overpoweringly good-looking!

"Well," he said, "I did it."

She gave an exclamation of enthusiasm.

"Gave the warning?"

He nodded.

"Met some of the Sheriff's men, and told them. I feel rotten about it, too—giving the boys away!"

"But it was the right thing!" she urged.

"Oh, yes, it was the right thing," he admitted, but his tanned fair face held still a lowering look. "I want to tell old Mason about it," he said, looking around.

"He's gone out. Miss Mason, too."

"Polly gone!" His expression was startled and a little anxious. "She ain't alone?"

Then Enid did a horrid thing. She knew that if Martin Hale thought Polly was alone he would go and hunt for her, so after a second's hesitation she deliberately gave him a false impression.

"There was a woman here," she said, slowly, "a queer-looking woman, funnily dressed."

"The Widow Short?" His face relaxed into a smile. "So Polly went back with her, eh? I'll go over there after a spell and fetch her back."

He threw his shabby hat on the table and came nearer to her. Big as he was, and untutored in the social graces, there was nothing awkward about him. He moved with natural ease and dignity as a fine animal moves. He could not be clumsy if he tried.

He leaned against the mantelpiece looking down

at Enid, her lovely little face coral pink in the firelight, her hair burnished gold.

"Seems sort of hard—you being here all alone," he said, his big voice softened unaccountably. "Long?"

She was unused to the brevity of hill-talk, and repeated "Long?"

"Long since they left you-all here alone," he elucidated.

"It seemed long," she said truthfully. It was inevitable that she should add with that dangerous candor which is part and parcel of the game of "Playing with Fire": "I'm so thankful that you came!"

In Martin Hale was the soul of a poet. To him, this meeting on the mountain tops with a Fairy Princess such as Enid was like a dream hitherto unrealized, a phantom too long hushed in fancy, a coming-true of exquisite unrealities which he had been guarding in his heart of hearts.

He loved Polly deeply and truly, but she did not spell for him the magic of existence, the glamour, the idealism, the phantasmal mirror of things which seemed tangled in the bright web of Enid's

hair, which seemed to glow mystically upon him from her gold-colored eyes.

"Must seem lonely to you—the Ridge," he said, in a commonplace way.

"Not now!" she ventured with the ghost of a smile, then grew quickly sober. "Oh, but it was lonely—at first. Until"—she quite forgot any game called "Playing with Fire," and therefore played it the better—"until I began to feel that —up—here—one couldn't be lonely!"

He looked at her fixedly. He didn't understand her words, but he vaguely understood her feeling, and nodded slightly, waiting for her to go on.

"You see," she proceeded breathlessly, "when one is down in the Valley—there are so many things to hear, and notice,—so many things going on—that one—one gets tongue-tied and *lonely*, just as we were saying. Oh, you don't understand!"

"I reckon maybe I do," he said, slowly, gazing at her vivid face. "Seems like you can't get a full breath down there, doesn't it?"

"It's more than that," Enid said. "It's—"

she had a sort of inspiration—"that the loneliest thing in this world is never to have any time with yourself."

There was another pause. Pauses were coming more frequently now, and lasting longer,—she realized that, with an unsteady pulse to punctuate the fact. For a few minutes longer they spoke—and stopped—and spoke again—phrases which seemed to have less and less meaning as their eyes grew unconsciously and uncontrollably more eloquent. They were both, for the time being, a little mad.

Fairy Princess and Mountain God, they stood for a moment on the edge of that mystical and perilous labyrinth where the rainbow beckons and the sirens call. Stood, for Enid had arisen, almost without realizing it, and faced him trembling slightly.

The winds outside had risen and drowned all other sounds.

"You are—beautiful!" said Martin Hale, low and unsteadily. He gazed at her as though she were a divine apparition, and yet he leaned closer to her even as he worshiped. With all his ideals

and dreams he was a man. Closer he bent, and she could not move. It was as though a spell, inscrutable and ruthless, were laid upon them both. Their pulses sang and there was a ring of fairy fire about them. . . .

And just at that moment the door was flung open.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE TRAIL

And over rough and smooth he rode,
Nor yet for anything abode,
Till dark night swallowing up the day
With blindness his swift course must stay.

. . . .

So, leading on his wearied beast,
Blindly he crept from tree to tree,
Till slowly grew that light to be
The thing he looked for, and he found
A hut on a cleared space of ground. . . .

—WILLIAM MORRIS.

TO go back a trifle.

Again the man in the undergrowth groaned, and Jack quickly made up his mind. Alighting, he made his way into the darkness.

Evidently the man was not yet very far gone, for he said, though hazily, "Password?"

Remembering his experience of the earlier part of the night, and having no idea in view but that

of succoring the man, whoever he might be, Jack answered pacifically:

"Mountain laurel."

The man gave another groan in which relief figured largely. "I was afraid you were one of Heaton's men!" he muttered faintly, and lost consciousness.

Jack struck a match and saw the brown wizened features of the little leader who had challenged him for the second time that evening. He felt more puzzled than ever, but anyway the immediate thing to be done was to get the wounded man under shelter. He felt for just a moment a trifle rueful, as he realized his predicament: a mountain to climb, Enid to take care of, a horse to lead, a wounded man to rescue—it seemed to him that he would never be able to get to the end of the problem that confronted him.

Naturally, his first impulse was to take the man back to the valley to be looked out for; Enid could wait. He lifted the limp body and prepared to hoist it into his saddle. He could ride the led horse, even though it was barebacked.

"Now, then," he said soothingly, "Dr. Clay will fix you up in no time."

The effect of these simple and encouraging words was electrical. Weak as he was, the wounded man began to struggle, crying in a fierce, trembling tone:

"Damn you! You're running me in: that's what you're doing! You're not playing on the square!"

"What are you talking about?" broke in Radnor, none too gently. "I don't want to leave you to die in the road, but I swear I will if there's any more of that sort of talk. If I take you to Dr. Clay's, there's no way of his knowing who you are and, as a patient, I don't think he'd give you away anyhow."

But the man only mumbled: "I'll never go! You sha'n't drag me! Damn you, let me alone!"

"Well," said Jack, "you're too sick a man at present to be held accountable for what you say, so I shall let you off an apology for those 'damn you's' and a few other little innuendos. If you won't go to Dr. Clay's, where do you want to go?"

"To the mountains—quick! I've a shack up there that I use sometimes. I've got to keep clear of the valley for a while. Not even he could save me, if it were known. I've been in that train mix-up."

"He? Who?"

But the man was swaying to and fro, and seemed unable to answer.

"Look, here," said Jack, speaking as though to a sick and unreasonable child, "you'll never be able to make the mountains. You're all in as it is."

"Feel—left-hand coat pocket," gasped the other.

Jack prepared to obey, but in feeling about in the darkness accidentally touched the right-hand pocket first. The man fairly shrieked at him.

"Left—I said—left! So that was your little game! To rob me, to double-cross me!"

"You're out of your head," said Jack, half-disgusted, and half-sorry for him. "If it's your gun that you're keeping in that precious right-hand pocket of yours, you're jolly well welcome to keep it. I've one of my own. Now, then—left, you said: here we are!—Oh, I see!"

He pulled out a pocket flask, unscrewed the top and handed it to his captive—or was it patient?—who proceeded to drink deeply.

"I've always heard that Virginians never stirred without something helpful like that along," reflected Jack aloud, "but I didn't know it was so. Came in handy this time, anyhow. Feeling better?"

The man nodded.

"Have a drop yourself," he said, in slightly stronger tones. Radnor had an idea that he was ashamed of the way he had spoken the minute before.

"No, thanks—hold on, I believe I will!" A sudden idea had occurred to him, confirmed by the swallow he took of the contents of the flask. It had quite a definite taste of its own entirely new to Jack.

"That's not whiskey!"

"Not on your life!" said the other. "It's the real thing. Genuine white liquor—the best made on the range."

He spoke proudly.

So they were not just yarns, these tales Jack had

heard of the uncivilized Southern hills! People really did hold up trains, and there was still a moonshining business, government reports notwithstanding.

Jack laughed almost incredulously. The thing was impossible; but the thing was so, so why waste time to disbelieve it? Meanwhile, since this wounded maniac wanted to go to his "shack," he supposed it was up to him to take him. The "white liquor" had given the man a bit of strength and he was able to mount Jack's horse without much assistance. He groaned, as he settled himself, but was fit enough now to watch with curiosity and some admiration Radnor's mounting of the saddleless horse—a somewhat effective performance even in that dim light. "You've a good seat," he remarked, when Radnor was up.

"I'll need it on these trails with no stirrups!" was the rather grim response. "Anything I can do to make you more comfortable?"

"No—thanks."

Jack smiled in the dark at the second word, clearly an afterthought, and said: "You'd better go first, so you can lead the way to your place."

The two rode upward through the damp, still darkness, and neither spoke a word.

It seemed to have been a ride ages long when Jack broke the silence between them by asking:

"Where is this place—this shack of yours, or whatsoever you call it, anyway?"

The man riding up the trail ahead of him murmured something unintelligible; then as Jack repeated his question more sharply, he said:

"It's just a piece beyond—Four Trail Crossing."

"We're almost there then," said Radnor, who could already smell the untainted winds of the upper ranges. It was strange, the way the air began to move and surge like a waking spirit as they climbed up above the slow and stagnant valley currents.

The next moment the men started and their horses with them. For somewhere and not too far away could be heard the sounds of shots.

"By the Lord!" gasped the man ahead. "They're at it! And me knocked out like this!"

To himself Jack said exultingly: "I knew

Ralph would never let the lot of them get away like that."

But now he was first and foremost anxious to get his wounded companion to a place of safety, and then to be in the thick of whatever trouble there was. And he had a pretty shrewd guess that whatever it turned out to be his friend would be moderately sure to be in it.

"See here!" he exclaimed hurriedly, "I—I'll have to leave you somewhere, and go on a bit to see what can be done. Would you mind being left at the Toll Gate?"

"Toll Gate's all right," said the other, but more feebly. The sudden burst of excitement at the crowd and the shots seemed to have left him weaker than ever. Jack's heart jumped with relief. Here was a partial solution to several problems at any rate. He would leave the man at Four Trail Crossing, reassure Enid, leave the led horse in the Toll-gate stable, and with the mount the wounded leader was now riding, go to the assistance of Ralph and his friends.

A few moments more saw the two horses climbing onto the level plateau where stood the Toll

Gate. The shots still sounded at intervals in the distance.

In less time than it takes to write it, Radnor had slipped from his horse, raced to the Toll-gate House, and flung open the door—confronting Enid and Martin Hale, alone together and obviously not expecting to see any one.

For a moment Jack Radnor was vaguely stunned. Astonishment that neither old Mason nor his daughter was there dwarfed all other feelings. But Enid's scarlet flush and Hale's stiffening of muscles as he faced him changed his first plain surprise into something sharper and more bitter.

He hardly recognized his own voice as he came forward and spoke.

"Miss Mason and her father are not here?"

"No," she said, also in an unnatural tone. "I have been quite alone—until Mr. Hale came."

"I hope that you were not alone long," said Jack, icily, "and I am glad you have been, since, so well protected!"

Hale's flush was dusky through his tan. He said nothing, however. Both he and Enid stood

still as though they were too paralyzed to move. In both of them was the stark, flat sense of reaction. The siren's song had gone, the glamour had faded. They felt bitterly annoyed with themselves and each other, as Jack Radnor looked them both over for a moment or two more.

Then he said to Enid, in a voice void of expression: "I have a wounded man outside. You will have to look out for him a bit."

She gave an exclamation of concern, and Hale, without being asked, went outside to help lift the man from his saddle.

Half an hour later the wounded man was comfortable on a rough couch in the living-room, and Radnor faced Hale coldly across him.

"I imagine Miss Forsythe can get along now," he said significantly, "without—either of us."

Hale, with a shrug of his great shoulders, moved toward the door. He and Enid had not looked at each other since Jack's unexpected entrance. The big mountaineer was conscious of a shudder through his whole being as he remem-

bered the way he had felt. The thing was past, but it had left its mark.

"Oh, by the way," said Jack, pausing as he turned to follow him, "it's rather an upset night, you know—and—though I don't think it's even possible, we'll provide against the odd chance."

He took the wounded man's revolver from his pocket and gave it to Enid.

"Careful," he reminded her. "It's loaded. I don't imagine you're the sort likely to lose your head, but take care. I'll feel better if you have it."

Something in his words hurt Enid,—the implication that being "not the sort likely to lose your head," she was in a way thrust outside the pale of ordinary emotional, impulsive feminine humanity.

"I will take care," she said coldly.

And Radnor and Hale left the room together, neither of them looking at her.

CHAPTER XII

DANGEROUS BLOOMS

. . To burst all links of habit—there to wander far away,
. . . . . .
There methinks would be enjoyment more than in this march of mind,
In the steamship, in the railway, in the thoughts that shake mankind.
There the passions cramp'd no longer shall have scope and breathing-space;
I will take some savage woman. . . .

—ALFRED TENNYSON.

ONCE outside the door the two men did not waste time over personalities. Whatever Radnor's individual prejudices or grievances against Hale or his behavior, he had a man's ability to merge them in more immediate and, generally speaking, more important issues.

"See here, Hale," he said quickly, "what side

are you on? Man to man, mind, and no dodging! I want to know whether you are with the law or against it!"

The light from the Toll Gate windows shone upon them, and each could see the other's face clearly.

Martin Hale hesitated, then he flung back his head and said roughly:

"You go your way, Radnor, and I'll go mine."

Jack Radnor felt himself get hot from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. He wanted to kill the man, to wreck him with a tempest of primitive fury. But these receding gun echoes! He had to get to Ralph's help.

"Go ahead, then," he said quickly. "It's none of my business. Wait a minute—you'll want your revolver."

He felt in his pocket, but—the revolver was gone.

"I've lost it!" he exclaimed, blankly.

"There'll be plenty in the house," said Hale. "I'll go back and get one."

He turned on his heel and went once more into the room that held Enid Forsythe. Jack laughed

briefly, mounted and set his horse at a quick gallop along the top-range trail. If Enid were the sort of girl to have a flirtation with a mountaineer, and if that mountaineer were practically a self-confessed member of a lawless people—then his concern with the affair was of the most nominal and formal sort. Help Denby he would; bring Enid home safely he would; but—he tried to tell himself that beyond these obligations he took no interest.

However, his heart ached, for he loved Enid better than all the round world.

A bough wet with night dews brushed his face. He pressed on in a sort of grim violence, born of his own hurt mood almost as much as of his fear for Ralph Denby and his men.

A woman's cry came to him. It rang so unexpectedly through the night that he was nearly unseated. And the cry was close at hand. As he reined up hastily, the shots he was in quest of were for the time being silenced.

The cry came again, more appealing and at the same time more explanatory:

"Oh, please—won't some one help?"

With a sharp ejaculation, Jack swung himself to the ground.

"Where are you?" he asked quickly. "Who is it? What is wrong?"

He nearly stumbled over something soft and restless, something struggling and tossing on the ground. As he knelt beside her, she fairly flung herself into his arms sobbing.

"Oh, it's Mr. Radnor; then it's all right! You'll take care of me, won't you?"

"But who—" he began helplessly.

"Oh, don't you know? It's Polly Mason. And I've twisted my ankle!"

At first Jack mentally consigned her to the nethermost depths of Gehenna. Then something in the clinging touch of her melted him. He was sincerely sorry for her predicament, and she was unusually attractive.

Brokenly she explained the situation. She told him about her father's departure, secure in the belief that the Widow Short would stay with the two girls at the Toll Gate; her own anxiety, at the sound of shots; her vain search for her father

and finally the luckless fall which had landed her helpless by the wayside.

"But," said Jack, still holding her as she leaned against his shoulder, crying with worrying pain, "isn't there some place—this Short woman's—or some one's—where I could take you to rest, for a bit? You see—" He hesitated. "I'm afraid that there may be a lot that I ought to do and——"

She gave a low cry and clutched him more closely.

"No—no," she paused. "You won't leave me? I've been so frightened, all alone! And my foot hurts so!"

There was no doubt as to the girl's sincerity, and Radnor felt at his wits' ends. The sudden quiet which had descended upon the shooting had somewhat relieved his mind of an instinctive sense of urgent responsibility!

"Let's try getting you on my horse, Miss Mason——"

She interrupted him with agonized appeal.

"Please — please — couldn't you take me to Malone's shack? That is nearest. It's only a

piece down the mountain—only you have to go cross-trail to get to it."

Jack wanted to say that he had been going cross-trail all the evening, but refrained.

The sharp memory of Enid flushing scarlet—of Hale, the mountaineer, straightening to meet him—stung Jack Radnor. Men are human after all. He lifted Polly gently in his arms, and leading his horse at the same time carried her carefully along the trail.

Following the girl's directions, he found that Malone's shack was a bit down hill on the farther side of the main trail; and even in coming to it Radnor remembered the goal his wounded friend had wanted to make for. Also he remembered the heavy flask with the engraved silver letter upon it, that might have been "M."

"What sort of a chap does this Malone look like?" he asked Polly.

"Oh, he's little and dark—dreadfully ugly! I hate him!" He felt her shudder, and had a shrewd idea that her hatred was based on something more tangible and at the same time more significant than mere antipathy.

Jack wondered. It was his man, then. Queer sort of a fellow, with his silver flask, and his moonshining, and his apparent respect for the law in the person of Judge Denby.

They reached the shack in a moment or two, and, after depositing Polly on the floor, Jack lit a match and surveyed the place.

It was very bare, and there were no signs of being constantly occupied. He remembered that the man had said he "used it sometimes." Then he was a Valley man, and this was only an occasional retreat—a hiding place, possibly.

Radnor took off his coat, and made Polly as comfortable upon it as he could, then produced more matches and set about getting some illumination and a little warmth. For it was chilly here with that thrilling cold of the hills that at night can strike through you even were it summer.

And Polly cuddled into his coat and watched him with softly brilliant eyes.

There are many types of men in the world, attracted by many types of women, but there seem qualities very nearly usual in the decent male: the little boy spirit that adores being mothered

and spoiled, and falls in love with almost any sympathetic woman who does it well; and the protective instinct which makes them absurdly charming and tender to helpless things—to children, and small animals, and especially to women who need this care and lean upon this strength.

That this is rooted really in masculine vanity is a truism, but only partly true, like most truisms. It has something much sweeter and nobler than that in it, and even egotism turned to such good use becomes a fine thing. There is nothing prettier and more touching to watch than the gentleness of a big man with a fragile little woman or a baby.

So it was that Jack Radnor treated Polly with the hurt ankle as she had never been treated before, with a consideration, and a kindness, and half-teasing, half-bullying, wholly tender protectiveness that made her ready to kneel down and worship him.

It was only after he had kindled a fire on the hearth, lighted a guttering candle which he found on the shelf of the shack, and after softly examining the foot, found that there was nothing

wrong with it other than a painful wrench, that he really remembered that Polly was not only a weak and suffering creature to be cared for but a very lovely woman as well,—one to defend himself against at that. He had never been unconscious of the fact, as has been intimated, but the realization had been kept in abeyance by her helplessness. Now in the rosy glow of the leaping fire, she looked a little less helpless; even—for Radnor was not new to the game and could analyze, even admit, facts when he met them—a little dangerous.

There are flowers that one longs to touch and to breathe the fragrance of. Polly was like one of those flowers. Not essentially more material than other girls, in fact, in most essentials, less so, she still exhaled a lure that drove men distracted in spite of themselves. It was not a wicked lure, for she was not a siren by avocation, but it was the sort of enchantment that sings to you from the heart of a lovely rose, when dusk falls and the hour gives to it all its destined sweetness and wonder.

It was all very well for Polly to make him out a sort of emasculated figurehead of romantic

manhood; he wasn't, and there was an end to that. No woman, much less one so innocently provocative as Polly Mason, could move about with those naïve caressing touches, those eager lingerings of eyes and smiles, without laying a spark under a manhood which was anything but emasculated. Radnor was in no sense a Don Juan, and a young girl under any ordinary circumstances could have traveled around the world with him without having her ideals even faintly besmattered by the mud of misunderstanding. But the conditions were peculiar.

First of all, one must take into consideration what one never does take into consideration: his present attitude of mind,—or mood, if that elastic phrase happens to please you best. Young men and women are not supposed to be swayed by emotions, but it happens that they are. And the emotions are violent and complicated according to the situations in which they are fostered. Jack and Polly were both in love,—he with Enid, and she with Martin,—but that, terrible as it may seem to the Victorian understanding, did not prevent them from being still human.

In Polly's brain, inherently literal in spite of an extraordinary coloring of sentiment, was a sort of boundary line between Gentlemen and Men. This is a peculiarly unlucky type of hallucination, because the two sorts, practically speaking, cannot exist independently. A real man must have something of the gentleman in him before he can pass muster among his kind; and may God defend us from the "gentleman" who is not first of all a man.

However, this is beside the question.

Polly stood in the position of a traveler in a strange land in which she is assured she will have full legal and actual protection, whatever she does. Hence, she took liberties with Jack Radnor which she would never have dreamed of taking with one of the mountain men to whom she was accustomed.

He stood on a side of the line supposedly innocuous and, being a creature of another and more subtle and refined world, was assumed by her to be beyond vulgar male instincts or temptations.

How much of her delight in adventuring in this Safe Land was due to her intuitive attraction to

Radnor is not to be recorded here. Certainly she did not recognize it; that much may be recorded, at any rate.

So she was very much surprised and enraged when, whipped beyond endurance, he kissed her.

He could not help it.

Could you help smelling a bunch of violets if it were held close to your face? And Polly was so close to him that he *felt* her. We won't explain that in case some one out of the many readers we hope to have, chance to understand it.

Her lips were deep red,—not scarlet-coral in tint,—and as he crushed his to them they made him vaguely giddy. Staggering back from that close, mad clasp, he felt a frantic distaste and revulsion of feeling. Such kisses should have been kept for Enid, only—he felt very sure that Enid would not have accepted them.

Which shows just how much he knew about it.

Polly in a wild revulsion of feeling, a frantic turbulence of disturbed ideals, shot backwards half across the room, as white as she had been rose-red before.

"How—dare—you?" she stammered.

Jack Radnor knew that there were no words in which to excuse himself to her, and he felt horribly, abysmally ashamed. He would not say the mechanical: "I beg your pardon," for it was altogether too inadequate. He merely stood with lowered head, tense in every muscle, and wondering whether he should ever be able to look Enid in the face again.

"I thought you were a gentleman!" Polly flung at him.

"So did I," was his simple response.

She laughed, an angry low laugh; and she had never looked lovelier in her life, though he could not know it since he was not looking at her.

"I wish your girl joy of you!" she went on, fiercely sullen. "Why don't you make love to her for a change? She's alone, and might like it!"

"Alone!"

Polly retreated even further before the look in his eyes, and the tone in his voice. She had not told him before that Enid Forsythe was alone at the Toll-gate House. She did not quite know why.

"Miss Forsythe is alone?" repeated Jack Rad-

nor, all softness gone from his clear brown eyes. "You left her there—*alone?*"

Polly, who liked to play with fire, but hated to admit it even to herself, nodded, with her head turned away.

"She's alone, all right!" she retorted. "And—it seems to me that's a fine question for *you* to ask!"

For the first time since the fatal kiss, they looked at each other, and it was as though they met the eyes of strangers. Suddenly they had slipped back across their crossed trails, and regarded each other with a hostile or at least an alien gaze.

It is a curious fact that, as Jack Radnor and Polly Mason kissed, they had not thought of one another. Now, facing the cold disillusionment of afterwards, they wondered, both of them, how the thing could ever have happened. Polly was not a passionate woman, in spite of her appearance, and she did not like being made love to too desperately. Jack was altogether too passionate to be able to endure—for more than a passing moment—any one except the girl whom he really loved with all of him,—heart, soul and body.

"Miss Mason," he said, with his eyes now very far from her face, "I am afraid that we would better go on toward the Four Trail Crossing. We —we may find some news of your father there——"

It was lame, and he knew it. Polly, throwing her cape about her, knew it, too, and she looked at him with a deep and resentful scorn.

Jack went quickly out into the open air, and breathed the night wind in deep gulps. He felt —it is hardly worth while to put down what he felt. Anyway, out of the many self-reproaches which the Black Evils in his conscience hurled at him and kept on hurling relentlessly, there was one which seemed to stay fixed in his heart like a barbed and poisoned arrow. Without intention, and without consequence, he had played Martin Hale false. All his life, that would be a debt to be paid somehow—whether Martin Hale ever knew it or not.

CHAPTER XIII

MALONE'S SHACK

. . . This life is wine, red wine,
Under the greenwood boughs! Oh, still to keep it,
One little glen of justice in the midst
Of multitudinous wrong.

—ALFRED NOYES.

"LISTEN!" exclaimed Polly, sharply.

Jack sprang to the door, and flung it open. Voices and galloping hoofs were rapidly nearing the shack.

Farther away rang out a shot, and then came the crash of a horse taking to the shrubbery. With an exclamation, Jack turned back, and picked up Polly and carried her to the one other room the cabin boasted. If there was to be trouble, she must at least be as far out of range of it as possible.

Then, turning quickly, he stood still in amazement, for it was Ralph's voice that he heard, and he was saying rather breathlessly:

"Come on, Hale. This is our best chance,—old Malone's shack. It's built to stand a good bit of a siege, if I know Malone!"

Into the cabin dashed Denby and Martin Hale, closing the door and lowering the great bars into place as soon as they were inside. Jack realized for the first time how unusually stoutly the shack was prepared for defense.

Then the two men turned and saw him. After one gasp of mutual astonishment, they promptly dismissed the stranger that had brought them together again under these circumstances, and went to work closing the wooden shutters, and otherwise strengthening their position.

"It's the train-robbing crowd," said Ralph hurriedly to Radnor. "Or at least a detachment of them. They separated us—" he indicated Hale —"from our own men and we had to run for it. Old Heaton will round them up, of course, but meanwhile—too bad to get you mixed up in it like this, Jack!"

"Rot!" said Jack, who was ransacking the cabin for firearms. But even as he hunted he was wondering how on earth Martin Hale and Ralph Denby should be on the same side, and why, if they both were with Sheriff Heaton's men, they should come so confidently to Malone's for refuge? The thing was getting more mixed up every minute. And the complications were not helped by Polly's presence in the next room. What would Martin Hale say to that? He remembered very well how he himself had felt that evening when he had come upon the young mountaineer and Enid in the Toll-gate House.

However, a gun was the thing he wanted now, and he couldn't find a sign of one.

"Damn the man!—Does he keep them locked up?" he growled impatiently.

"Not armed, Jack?" said Denby. "You were, earlier in the evening."

"I lost that," said Radnor shortly. Until he understood the situation more clearly there was nothing to be gained by stating that it was Hale's revolver that he had lost.

"By Jove, that's a pity!" exclaimed Denby. He

turned to Hale: "He's a crack shot,—better than I am,—and I'm willing to bet he's better than you, too!"

"Easy enough," said the young hill man, briefly. "I'm fair, but I'm not a dead shot."

"Hello!" cried Denby, in suppressed excitement, "I believe they're coming!"

Crash after crash in the underbrush and a sudden shout told them that their enemies had seen the light in the cabin window.

Denby turned impressively to Jack, and held out his revolver.

"I hate to be out of a scrap," he said, "but I can't use this as well as you can! Go to it!"

At the same moment, Hale held out his weapon to Radnor.

"Here's old man Mason's," he said. "Better keep yours, Mr. Denby. I'm not needing it to-night."

Ralph stared at him. Outside the cabin, the rush and stumble of horses sharply stopped filled the brief pause.

"But——" Denby began.

Hale stopped him. "These fellows outside are

my crowd," he said simply. "I couldn't pull a gun on them, could I?"

A heavy knock came on the door.

"Is Billy Malone there?" demanded a rough voice.

"No!" said Denby, clearly.

There was a sort of snarl outside, and confused and broken sentences reached them: "That's him!" "That's the chap with Heaton's men. I knew some of 'em had run in here!" "Damned lucky for the skunks that Malone's away!" Then the voices became more threatening.

"Open the door!" commanded some one. "Open the door, or we'll smash it—and you, too!"

"I'll open no door when I'm asked to in that fashion!" retorted Ralph, wrathfully. He had Southern blood himself, and could not stand being ordered about.

"Steadily!" warned Jack with his hand on his arm. Ralph shook him off and cried:

"I am Deputy Sheriff, and I represent the Law. —If you fellows will talk sense instead of threatening me, I'll open the door and have it out with

you. But——" Radnor caught hold of him again and made him listen to him almost by physical force. His was in all ways the stronger will and personality and he forced it on his friend, until Ralph most unwillingly stood silent.

"You idiot!" said Jack, in a low tone, but with deep and fervent emphasis. "Don't you see you're going about the whole thing wrong end first? We're in no position to dictate terms. Use your head, Ralph, if you can get the blood out of it long enough. Violence is just what we don't want,—anything but that, because if it comes to that we haven't a dog's chance. Do you really suppose you and I with a gun apiece can uphold the Majesty of the Law against a gang of highwayers and cut-throaters?—Will you keep your fool mouth shut for a minute while we decide what to do?"

"Do what you damn please," said Denby, a little suddenly but more sensibly.

"Better decide quick!" come the harsh voice at the door. "Do we break down the door or not? —We'd burn you out, you rats, if you weren't in Bill's shack!"

Jack turned quickly to Martin Hale.

"Have you any influence with these men?" he demanded, in a sharp undertone.

"Only in one way," said Hale, speaking slowly. He seemed to be nerving himself for something. Suddenly he squared his splendid shoulders. "We'll try it anyhow," he said firmly. "I guess it's coming to me!"

He raised his powerful voice and called:

"Malone's not here, boys, but I am—Hale!"

"Hale!" There was a chorus of excited astonishment. Through it ran a rising surge of resentment that culminated in the fierce and accusing query:

"What are you doing with one of Heaton's men, Mart Hale?"

"If I open the door and tell you," said Martin, "will you agree not to start anything till we've thrashed the whole thing out?"

"Good for you!" muttered Jack.

"If you're with the Deputy Sheriff we won't agree to anything!" shouted one of the men outside. "Come on, boys—down with her!"

There was a rush for the door, but before they

could reach it both Jack and Martin had sprung to the big bars, lifted them, and swung the door wide open. It was a desperate chance but the only one.

"Now speak to them, quick!" commanded Jack.

The men, astonished by the unexpected opening of the door paused for just an instant. It was enough. Hale stopped and frowned facing them with his hands up. There was a puzzled silence, and Martin spoke quietly, while Jack and Denby stood tense and waiting close at hand,—the former with old Mason's revolver firmly clutched in his coat pocket.

"You see I'm not armed," said Hale. "I want to talk to you a moment."

"Boys," said Hale, "I'm one of you and you can trust me. I'll never land one of you in trouble and you know it. But, boys, I'm through. I want to quit the game and I'm putting it up to you straight. Ain't I got the right to?"

No one spoke, though so far they listened to him without breaking in. After a wistful look over the sullen faces, Hale squared his shoulders sharply and said, in a voice that rang:

"I gave the hold-up away, boys!"

Above the roar of fury from the mob came Polly's shrill cry of "Martin—oh, Martin! They'll kill you!"

The shuddering notes of her voice seemed to put new strength and authority into the man. He raised one powerful arm and stilled the tumult as all real force, either spiritual or physical, can always still disturbance.

"Listen to me!" he ordered sharply. "I've been one of you, stuck by you, and you'd kill me like a 'possum, because I dared——"

The growling wave of anger rose more menacingly than before, but before it could break into its foam of violence Jack Radnor had taken a hand. He held the revolver in his hand and composedly though casually moved it on a slow and cursory orbit covering intermittently every point in the crowd the while he talked.

"Maybe you think," he said, in his clean-cut, well-bred accents that commanded at least attention, "that Hale was only trying to do you a dirty trick when he tipped Heaton off to that blackguardly business down the track to-night.—Hold

on there! I'm running this show till I get through talking, and I don't like being interrupted!"

Acting on a sudden impulse he deliberately flung up his revolver and shot at a swaying branch disclosed by the wavering light from behind him. A delicate flutter of leaves descended. He singled out a spot on the trunk a bit farther down and hit that. A man moved uncomfortably in the crowd, and the seemingly leisurely and preoccupied revolver covered him instantly. A hat began to duck stealthily and suddenly flew into the air. It was a risky game, but it appealed to the rough viewpoint of the men. Somebody laughed. "All right, mister," he called, "I reckon we'll listen!"

Jack, however, still held the gun, as he went on speaking as though there had been no interruption.

"As a matter of fact, you confounded idiots," he said, "Hale did you the whitest turn any man ever did a set of ruffians. He was one of you, and he did his damnedest to keep you from queering yourselves into the penitentiary. I'm not preaching. I'm talking horse-sense at the end of

a gun,—which is the only way any chap has a chance to talk sense in this part of the world, as far as I can see!——"

"What was that?" muttered Ralph, quickly in his ear. Horses, unquestionably, were coming nearer. A hope sprang contagiously from breast to breast among the three young men in the shack, but Radnor raised his voice to cover the approaching sounds.

"Hale is the last man on earth to turn State's evidence,—if that means getting any of his pals into trouble. He—*listen* to me, you chicken-heads, don't keep turning around like that! Haven't you lived in the hills long enough to get used to bats and hoot-owls?—He——"

But the play was over. A crash in the underbrush started every man's hand toward his hip, but the subsequent click made them each pause half-way. Sheriff Heaton's husky drawl, sharpened by urgency, cut the air definitely.

"Hands up, everybody! If that's Martin Hale standing at Malone's door, he's under arrest!"

CHAPTER XIV

ENID'S PATIENT

. . . Doing ill,
Expect some ill be done thee! . . .
. . . In the toils
O' the net, where swords spring forth, will he be fast—
Minded to kill his neighbors—the arch-knave!
. . . A dying man,
Your foe, that pays the price of deeds he did.
—ROBERT BROWNING.

EFT alone in the Toll-gate House, Enid confronted her charge with mingled feelgs. The little wizened man—Malone by name, ough she did not know it—was not an attractive ecimen of humanity at his best. Wounded and ith his ugly features pinched and haggard, he as a still less agreeable vision. Enid was dededly repelled by him; moreover, she was not ed to sick-nursing and her ministering instincts

were as yet somewhat embryotic. Add to her disconcerted attitude of mind the reaction of mood after her dangerous play with Martin and you may guess something of the chaotic condition of her sensations as she looked at the wounded man left in her care. She was very far from heartless, however, and really did her best after a certain instinctive fastidious shrinking to do what she could for her patient. Under her light hands, busied in smoothing the cushion under his head and easing the position of his injured arm, he opened his eyes.

"Are you feeling better?" asked Enid kindly.

The lamplight on her fair hair gave her, for the moment, a sort of nimbus, and the man blinked at her in a puzzled way.

She brought a cup of spirits and water mixed by Radnor for emergencies and put it to his lips.

"Who the devil are you?" demanded the sick man, staring up at her.

"Your nurse," returned Enid, thinking that she might just as well waive full explanations as long as possible. At any rate, she did not know much about the true inwardness of the situation.

Jack had been in anything but an illuminating mood.

"Nurse!" repeated the man. "Which of us is dopey?"

Enid wanted to laugh, and yet she realized that the situation could not be accepted as a laughing matter. In the first place the man might die on her hands. As she looked at him he moaned harshly.

"You're in pain," Enid said pityingly. "Let me help you to lie more comfortably."

Radnor and Hale had cut his sleeve away and the slit coat was rumpled up underneath him in a way which must have aggravated his suffering. She bent to arrange it more easily, and started as though transfixed. For from the sagging pocket at the side of the coat, which had been cut off, slipped suddenly a small shining thing—a thing which Enid recognized, unless indeed as she had half-believed more than once that night she were really at home in bed dreaming the whole business. She did not betray her astonishment, but bent in an unconcerned way and picked up the glittering little object. It was just what she had

imagined—the quaint little emerald pin she had given Alice Baker the Christmas before. How on earth had it gotten into the pocket of this horrid little man of the hills? Alice Baker was, so Enid told herself, many miles from Warm Sulphur Springs. What was her brooch doing here? And yet there was no doubt about it. The setting made the matter certain, for it was unusual and unmistakable. Enid had bought it at an antique shop and recognized even the odd dent in the beaten silver rim. She slipped it unostentatiously into the front of her shirtwaist and eyed her patient with growing distrust and disfavor. However the pin had come into his hands it could scarcely have been by any honest means. Acting on a sudden impulse, Enid suggested his turning slightly on his other side, with his face away from her. This was accomplished with comparatively little trouble. As soon as his head was turned aside, Enid quickly plunged her hand into the pocket and drew out—a handful of jewelry of varying value. Among them was a little college pin of garnets and pearls—a white "H" upon a deep red flag. She had one exactly like it, given

her by Jack Radnor, and she knew that Ralph Denby had given Alice one.

Suddenly she knew that this man was some one who might some day be very much wanted by a great many persons. And yet she must stay here and nurse him instead of giving him up to justice. Before she had time, however, to feel more than the beginnings of dismay at this situation, all responsibility was taken out of her hands by the man turning on her with an unexpected, cat-like twist, and—catching her in the very act of examining his loot!

The quick rage that lighted his eyes made the girl retreat from the couch. She had never believed a human countenance could be capable of so much vengeful malevolence.

"So!" snarled the man, breathing hard and painfully. "You'd rob a chap that's sick and not able to take care of himself! You're a pretty one, you are! But you'll not get off so easy—you——"

He struggled to get off the couch.

"Oh, don't!" cried Enid in real distress, her new-born excitement in the rôle of amateur de-

tective lost in the purely humane desire to keep him from hurting himself. "You mustn't! You'll start your wound bleeding again! I only happened to see the things——"

"You lie! You're a rotten spy!" croaked the man venomously. "They left you here to spy on me and rob me! But I won't stand for it—d'you hear? I won't——"

Tottering weakly, he did actually manage to stagger to his feet and with his face the more terrifying because of its ghastliness started toward her. A deep red streak widened on his dirty shirt sleeve with every movement that he made.

Beseeching him to be quiet, to lie down, Enid backed away from him, wondering what in the world she ought to do. Again the decision was taken out of her hands by the Chance that seemed to rule this strange night.

The quiet darkness outside suddenly became populous and violent. Down the clear long stretch from the Ridge Trail horses were plunging at a dangerous pace. The ring of shots in the distance was caught by the granite crags about and multiplied in very tantalizing echoes. Men's

voices came stridently nearer and there was the crunch of gravel under slurring hoofs, and the unmistakable creak of leather. A horse snorted and sneezed, pulled up abruptly and the rough voices lowered to tense urgency. . . .

The door opened quickly and vehemently to admit the Toll-gate Keeper himself. With him was Martin Hale and behind them a knot of the hill outlaws.

The situation, hastily, not to say sketchily, explained by old Mason, was this:

The men of the hills, realizing that Martin Hale had not meant to betray them, had suddenly turned in his favor. When Heaton's posse had appeared it had only been a minute before these rough but sincere mountaineers had rallied around their old comrade and contrived one of those elusive and baffling get-aways with him that are forever exasperating even to the most experienced minions of law and order. Somewhere from under old Heaton's eyes they had abstracted the prisoner and with him had melted away among the rough undergrowth that fringed the Ridge. At the plateau before the Toll-gate House they

had met with Mason who was now about to help Hale to safety. Seeing Malone, he gave a sharp ejaculation and said: "He must be looked to, as well, boys! Lord knows *I* didn't want to be mixed up in these doings any longer, but Mart's innocent and has to get off and we can't leave Malone for them to pick up at their convenience."

"What'll you do—send 'em by the Other Way?" demanded one of the mountaineers.

Mason nodded.

"I reckon," he said. "Anyhow, you can leave the two of 'em here all right. They'll not be taken, I'll bet ye!"

"That's good enough," said the man who had spoken before. "Good-night, partner."

A low mutter of "good-nights" rumbled through the darkness—a darkness which Enid thought was beginning almost imperceptibly to lighten to a faint and ghostly gray. A moment later the Toll-gate Keeper closed the door and turned to her.

"Well," he said, kindly enough, "are you game, young lady? Your mother was."

"Do you know my mother?" asked Enid, surprised.

The old man nodded.

"Maybe I do and maybe I don't. I think so. Anyhow, we've no time for all that now. We've got to send these chaps the Other Way."

"And what," asked Enid, utterly mystified, "is the Other Way? It sounds—creepy, somehow, though I don't know why."

The Toll-keeper laughed.

"The Other Way," he explained, "is simply a way of saying the way that other folks don't know of,—not the regular way, not the known way, not the *above-ground* way. Don't look so puzzled, child. You'll see in a moment what I mean."

Hale helped him to move a chair and a rug away from a certain spot in the floor. The boarding underneath showed on close scrutiny a definitely square outline. Almost at once Enid saw what it must be: a trapdoor of some sort leading —where?

"The Other Way," proceeded Richard Mason, kneeling to insert a stubby knife blade in a crack, as a prier, "is the way through the underground caves of these mountains of ours. We use it very

seldom, but it is a safe, secret country in emergencies and—this is the door of it!"

He bent farther over and, fascinated, Enid's eyes followed the deft movement of his hand.

CHAPTER XV

THE OTHER WAY

So I'm aff and away to the muirs, . . .
Ranging far frae frowning faces, and the douce folk here;
Crawling up through burn and bracken, louping down the screes,
Looking out frae crag and headland, drinking up the simmer breeze.

. . . . . .

Oh, to hear the eagle screaming, sweeping, ringing round the sky—
That's a bonnier life than stumbling ower the muck to colt and kye.

—CHARLES KINGSLEY.

SLOWLY the solid oak lid of the door moved upward: for a breathless moment Enid gazed into a hot darkness that thrilled her with mysterious potentialities. So the Toll-gate House was built like this, on a veritable volcano,—or what seemed actually worse than a volcano—a space, an abyss of undreamed of depth and reach,

warmed and freshened by strange underworld airs that faintly murmured, or so she fancied, like captive winds. Already Hale was carrying the wounded man across the room. It was a painful business, for he was fretful with pain—half delirious indeed—and Martin was forced to pause more than once to ease the tortured shoulder and wipe the cold sweat from his drawn face. And before the black gap in the floor could be reached —they all started and listened with strained attention. For they were coming—the men of the law. The voices of men and the scrambling tread of pressed horses drew always closer. There was no time for escape now. Noiselessly, with a frowning look, Richard Mason lowered the trapdoor. Hale, holding his burden, hesitated and Enid pulled the couch quickly forward.

"Lay him here!" she said. Hale did so; the couch was sufficiently close to the trapdoor to hide it from the casual observer. There had been no time to replace the rag rug. It was Enid, too, who, even as heavy footballs sounded at the door of the Toll-gate House, seized the cloth on the center table. Mason, quicker-witted than Hale,

ised the lamp enough to let her pull the cover-
g off. She flung it over Malone, whispering
Don't move, as you value your life!"

Then she pushed Martin down back of the
uch, so that he crouched close to the edge of
e trapdoor. Mason saw her idea.

"We'll do it yet!" he muttered exultantly, and
en called aloud: "Coming, coming! What's
l the row about?"

As he hurried to the door he could not suppress
chuckle as he caught a glimpse of Enid calmly
ttling herself upon the couch, leaning back
gainst the covered form of Malone as non-
alantly as though his bumpy little person were
pile of sofa cushions.

The opening door admitted Jack, carrying
olly, Ralph Denby and Heaton. The rest of the
heriff's men waited outside—pushing as close to
ie door as possible in order to miss nothing.
ven in these wild hills a night like this was some-
ing a bit out of the ordinary.

It was a question as to which face, Jack's or
nid's, was the greater study at that moment,—
is when he saw her languidly lounging there, ap-

parently quite indifferent to the turbid happenings of the night, or hers when she stared at him carrying Polly Mason in his arms.

However, there was no time for personalities of any sort, as the business of the moment was the apprehension of Martin Hale. Mason, with a coolness which the Sheriff's men found disconcerting, told them to search the place. Enid, as they proceeded to do so, stretched herself even more lazily and comfortably against the curiously padded back-rest of her couch. And as two of the posse passed into one inner room to search, one into another, and a fourth went to peer through the back door, Enid's eyes caught those of the Toll-keeper in a swift illuminating flash. Jack Radnor saw that look and stood rooted to the floor, for it was as though he saw Enid for the first time. That alert, alive, significant expression that could not belong to his conventional little fiancée. He had no time for wonder, however. Almost as soon as that lightning glance had passed between them, old Mason had clumsily stumbled against the heavy center table. Down it went, lamp and all, and after a crazy flash and

a great deal of evil smell, the Toll-gate House was in complete darkness. So many sounds were audible, or seemed to be audible, in that darkness, that it was hard to say what one heard and what one did not. There seemed to be faint groans, sundry creakings,—as from rusty hinges or the like,—and a faint, dull bang, then a scuffling, shuffling sound, and then—some one found a match and struck it. Its fitful flare showed Enid standing erect, with some heavy drapery in her hands. A tardily discovered candle disclosed the same thing, only revealing further that she was crying hysterically with her face buried in the folds of what she held. It appeared to be the cover which had been upon the couch.

Jack, stirred instantly at sight of her overwrought condition, took a quick step forward toward her, but she turned from him and sank in a heap on the floor not far from the couch. As she crouched there she listened eagerly for the sounds that would tell her that Martin Hale and Malone were escaping on the Other Way. For, naturally, they had taken the opportunity that Mason had given them by overturning the lamp.

And, of course, Jack Radnor had to choose that moment to say:

"Enid, is there anything I can do for you?"

She turned on him in an irritation that positively made her tremble. For the first time in her proper little life she let herself go:

"Yes!" she cried vehemently, *"Go to the devil!"*

Radnor stared blankly at her and walked out.

Heaton and his men scattered to hunt for the fugitive Hale, and Mason bent over his daughter, petting her and making much of the hurt ankle. Enid hid her face and did not lift it again until Radnor came in again with the formal announcement that the horses were ready.

This time when he asked her if she wanted to go home Enid agreed without demur. If there was a certain distant atmosphere about her, her fiancé did not seem to notice it. He mounted her carefully and impersonally and they set out in the red of an unseasonably hot and fiery sunrise! Something in the air was close and oppressive, and though the winds were still, anyone who knew the mountains would have had a presentiment of

impending evil weather. Not for nothing and for no reason do these sultry lurid dawns come thundering in the late summer. Inevitably they are sinister heralds, flinging their blood-red banners across a cowed world, announcing the devastation and storm that follow, hungrily, in their wake.

Old Mason stood at the door of the Toll-gate House and watched them go.

"She's like her mother," he said, half-aloud. "More spirited, outwardly, — but I wonder whether she has half the spirit within her?"

Then he went in to his daughter. Polly was crying a little and nursing her wrenched foot. She had not done anything wrong, but she felt vaguely ashamed, and, at the same time, sorry for herself.

"Oh, Dad," she moaned, softly into the Toll-keeper's sympathetic shoulder, "there seems to be an awful lot more things we-all girls have to worry about than you-all men!"

" May *seem* so, honey," he comforted her, "but I reckon men and women are mighty like each

other, take it all in all. Now I'll make you some coffee, little girl!"

Down the trail rode Radnor and Enid, silent in that still red dawning. Already the air was hot; a haze lay over the Valley.

"Your friend, Miss Baker, is down there," Jack remarked casually.

Enid's tired body straightened in her saddle as if galvanized.

"Jack Radnor, what are you talking about? Alice isn't within miles of Warm Sulphur Springs."

"She wasn't, but she is now," interrupted Radnor, as patiently as he could. Enid's attitude had not been a comfortable one with which to associate, and as for being tired—well, the dear Lord knew he was tired himself. He didn't waste words this morning.

However, as Enid pressed the matter, her feminine curiosity utterly vanquishing her fatigue, he gave her in a somewhat cut-and-dried style an account of the events of the night in the Valley.

Enid listened, utterly absorbed, and when he had finished his narrative of the hold-up of the

Millionaire's Local she drew a deep excited breath.

"And to think I've got those things of Alice's!"

It was Jack's turn to stare. "How came you to have them?" he was beginning, but Enid hurried on.

"Well, I have! Right here,—only look!" She spread out some small bright objects in her bare pink palm and they gleamed in the rose-red sunrise light. "There's her Harvard pin—just like mine, and——"

"By the Lord Harry!" laughed Jack, heartily. "You've double-crossed our friend the bandit this time!"

"How double-crossed him? You didn't tell me he was a bandit—if you mean the man you left me to take care of—do you?"

"You bet I do! And you've gotten his loot, without even knowing what you were doing! Aren't you proud of yourself?"

"For what?" she wanted to know.

"For regaining valuables from a desperate outlaw, who had succeeded in holding up the——"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Enid, disdainfully.

"I'm only glad I got this stuff because, if Alice *is* here, she'll want to wear some of it at the Powder Dance to-night."

Jack stared at her. Powder Dance! How had she contrived to remember such a thing, here at dawn, among the everlasting hills? Her hair glowed like a nimbus around her small ivory-pale face. She looked exalted, exquisite,—yet, she was already considering the Powder Dance in the Valley that night!

Girls *were* queer things and no mistake!

CHAPTER XVI

NOON IN THE VALLEY

She frowns no goddess, and she moves no queen,
The softer charm that in her manner lies
Is framed to captivate, yet not surprise;
It justly suits the expression of her face. . . .

—SHERIDAN.

STORM brooded over the Valley all that day, but it was storm couchant, in abeyance, waiting craftily and sullenly behind the thick golden haze which scarcely stirred from hour to hour, so seldom did a wind arise. At the Warm Sulphur Springs, the atmosphere was quite as usual. People who came to the Springs were accustomed to having their own way, irrespective of weather or seasons; a consistent artificiality even in the normal matters of life had made them impervious to those conditions which affect more elementary

beings. When they came to the mountains it was for certain definite and defined purposes, and nothing could stand in their way. If it rained, they played bridge instead of golf; that was all the difference it made. They did not even deign to complain; it would have been a confession of mere mortal weakness to have admitted that a beneficent not to say partial God had by any chance made them uncomfortable.

So, in spite of the sultriness and the falling barometer, half-past eleven in the morning saw the place in full swing. The real patients, rheumatic and gouty cripples on crutches and in chairs, made their way to the Bath House. Those jaded men and fagged women who were paying the price of too much pleasure, or too much work, or too much society, or too much gormandising, or too much ambition, or too much of the variously expensive pursuits of life, were straggling out to play such games as they dared to play without creating too inconvenient an appetite for food and drink.

The band was playing in the pagoda-shaped bandstand overlooking the tennis courts. It was

pre-eminently the voice of the place, that band,—eloquently expressive of its energetic, yet carefree and luxurious life,—a life given up solely to having the best possible time compatible with taking a cure. The same wise instinct which made Ned Sperry confine his afternoon tea music to violins and 'cellos, caused him to prescribe brass in large doses in the middle of the day.

The members of the hotel orchestra were domiciled in a tumbledown old house on the outskirts of the golf-links, where their practice could not disturb the guests, and it was generally believed that Sperry made august visitations in the dead of night with menus,—one means programs, of course,—for each day. It is possible enough, for like all geniuses, no detail was too trifling to command his attention. At any rate the Warm Springs Band was getting a deserved reputation. He had contrived to put the Virginia sunshine into the clarionets and trombones, even as he put the colored electric lights into the soft and often muted strings.

Usually melodies rang out blithely, seeming to come dancing down the fresh winds that blew

robustly from the northern end of the Valley. But to-day the very blithest melodies selected by Sperry and approved by his leader,—or vice-versa,—seemed to fall with a heavier cadence than they should have.

"There's something wrong with the air!" said one of the musicians, a bit disconsolately. He was artistic and a sensitive soul.

But the Springs resorters were for the most part not sensitive. Already the whole place, surfaced with rolling lawns that looked like bright green plush, was dotted with men in white flannel and ducks and women in rainbow gowns.

Mrs. Forsythe was sitting with Judge Denby near the tennis court where their two children, with Alice Baker and Jack Radnor, were playing tennis. Mrs. Forsythe looked a shade tired,—for she had been in a fever of nervousness until Enid reached the hotel safely at sunrise,—but she was as charming as usual, in an exquisitely simple two-hundred dollar embroidered muslin frock, of a subtle lavender which was close enough to rose color to bring out the delicate flush of her smooth cheeks.

"*Look* at that child of mine, if you please!" she exclaimed in humorous despair. "She came home at daybreak this morning, and she is playing tennis as enthusiastically as though she had had nine hours of sleep!"

"And every one of the nine a beauty sleep!" supplemented Judge Denby. "She really is the most radiantly pretty thing that I have seen in many a day!"

Mrs. Forsythe smiled fondly at the vivid little figure as it sped across the court with the swiftness and grace of a wheeling bird.

Enid was dressed in white and scarlet, and had thrown her hat aside as usual. The sun burned her hair to flame; her face was flushed and eager.

She was playing with Ralph Denby against Alice Baker and Jack. This assorting of partners was entirely her doing. She laughingly insisted that Alice and Ralph were no good when they played together, but it was really because she did not want Jack for a partner, a fact of which he was perfectly well aware. He felt decidedly angry with her, and his mood made him, if anything,

somewhat handsomer than usual, putting an added touch of color in his brown cheek, and an unwonted sparkle in his dark eyes.

"What a decorative thing he is!" Alice had murmured in Enid's ear when they had come down to join the young men an hour earlier.

To which Enid had retorted, with marked acidity:

"Useless articles have to have *some* excuse for being made!"

"'A thing of beauty is a joy forever!'" Alice had reminded her. "You unappreciative little savage! A perfectly good *objet d'art* is being wasted on you!"

Alice herself was looking very handsome indeed; but, though she was neither awkward nor heavily built, she looked both when compared to Enid. Jack Radnor found some perverse and grudging satisfaction in looking at Enid across the net. She might be hard and obstinate and wilful and numberless other unpleasant things, but she was adorable.

A ball bounded across the court and along the lawn.

Judge Denby sprang up almost as alertly as his son might have done, and tossed it back with an easy pitch. Mrs. Forsythe, watching him, thought him as handsome in his own way as either of the young fellows on the court.

"I think," she said to him, smiling, when he had returned to her side, "that you are as impertinently fresh and energetic as Enid!—No, I truly believe you are worse! What do you mean by looking like that when, as I know perfectly well, you have been up practically all night, waiting for Ralph? 'Do you think at your age it's quite right?' "

The Judge laughed, a round and mellow laugh.

"It is because of a clear conscience and a beautiful disposition!" he confided. "There is nothing like them to keep one feeling and looking young! —As you must know!" he added, with the old-fashioned, flattering intonation which always pleased Mrs. Forsythe.

"I do not believe," he went on meaningly, "in encouraging the shameless feminine sport of fishing, but——"

He paused with one of his merry eloquent looks.

Mrs. Forsythe laughed.

"Augustine is a very remarkable maid!" she said demurely.

"Is she wholly responsible?"

"Wholly! I tell you, she is truly remarkable."

"She is beyond price!" said the Judge with solemn emphasis.

Judge Denby's little compliments and gallantries, his air of deference and admiration, always made Mrs. Forsythe feel more interested in life than usual. Under his flattering glance, she blushed very slightly, her womanly vanity rather pleasantly and innocently aroused.

Ultra-modern and *mondaine* as she was, she still loved the pretty exaggerations and formalities of an older day. Many women of the world acquire, with years, this taste for the ruffles and snuff-box period. For that was pre-eminently the golden era for men and women of middle age or past. The grandiloquent, stilted, charming times, forever associated in our minds with spinets and pot-pourri and flowery and long-winded talk, were times when maturity reigned supreme. Youth ran

through it,—chattering, kissing, laughing, fighting, sobbing,—for youth is pretty much the same at all dates and in all latitudes. But that was not an age in which youth was at all dominant. Young things, with their violent tragedies and even more violent romances, were out of key with the tune that went with sweeping curtsies and high-heeled shoes. Middle age, with its sober and delicate comedies, its enchanting restraints and equally enchanting absurdities, flourished in whimsical austerity in those lost years wherein living was an artistic achievement and not an emotional necessity.

It was, one must remember, a time of High Comedy,—and in rose-white youth there is not, and never has been, even a breath of Comedy!

As they sat there, Judge Denby yielded to an impulse such as comes in moments of enervation even to the strongest and the most self-sufficient of natures.

"Did you ever know," he said, "of the trouble between Dick and myself?"

Mrs. Forsythe started.

"Dick!" she repeated. And then she said, in

an odd tone: "What made you think of Dick just now?"

"I hardly know," the Judge answered her abstractedly. "I was thinking of you as you used to be,—you had a look just a moment ago that I have often seen on your face when you were a girl. And—when I think of you as a girl, I always, somehow, think of Dick, too."

As he said it, he realized with a faint shock, how true it was. She and Dick had been almost inseparable when they were all young things together years ago. The recollection made him feel curiously lonely. . . .

He hurried on:

"When Dick dropped out—it was my fault. I—" he paused and his face hardened oddly,—"I was not—honest. I let him suffer when I could have saved him. No; I was not honest."

Mrs. Forsythe could hardly believe her ears. But as she looked at him, amazed, she saw that he looked suddenly old.

"Why did you speak of it now?" she whispered, with a shiver, in spite of the sultriness of the day.

"I don't know," said Judge Denby. "I seem to feel Dick closer to me than ever before,—than ever before! . . . Ah! They have finished the set! Well, children, and which side has won?"

CHAPTER XVII

AT TWILIGHT

. . . We catch love,
And other fevers, in the vulgar way:
Love will not be outwitted by our wit,
Nor outrun by our equipages.
—E. B. BROWNING.

ENID FORSYTHE and Alice Baker were exchanging twilight confidences. It was late on the same afternoon, the afternoon of the *Cotillon Poudré*,—the Powder Dance in regard to which Enid had been so concerned. Alice had come to Enid's room ostensibly to help her curl, dress and powder her hair for the dance, but in reality to "have a comfortable talk." Every woman knows what that means.

The girls had not seen each other for some time, and in spite of certain reserves and surface

subterfuges inevitable between girls of their training and environment, they were genuinely fond of each other and wanted the shy luxury of confessing, discovering and generally discussing their respective heart-dramas.

It was not yet quite dark. The sunset light was sifting in through the closed curtains combining with the colored glow within. The maid would have closed the heavier draperies, shutting out the gloaming, but Enid stopped her. Through the two squares that made the windows one could still see the big mountain range, undulating black against the sky. And the sky was tinged with that magical afterglow which only the eastern heavens may know in perfection. The mood of the hour stole into the room and affected the two girls.

Enid, enveloped in a great gold-embroidered kimono, sat on the foot of the chaise longue. Alice, in vivid green, wandered restlessly about.

They made a charming picture in their contrasting good looks. Enid so delicately fair and golden, so young and so deceptively fragile in appearance; Alice so dark, and little and vivacious.

The electric lights in Enid's room had all been softened by rose-colored shades and the chaise longue was heaped with mauve cushions. The maid at the dressing-table went about her business of arranging exquisite things until Enid stopped her, gently enough, and asked her to make tea,—her own particular brand, not the sort that one could order by telephone, from the hotel office.

"Mais, parfaitement, Mademoiselle," agreed Augustine, and, unseeing, the brush she had thought to put upon the dressing-table, slid to the floor. Alice, lolling back in a low wicker chair, picked it up. It was, apparently, of delicately carved gold.

"My word!" said Alice. Enid looked up abstracted, and then laughed.

"Oh, surely! That is nice, isn't it? I had a fit once and decided to have all my ugly silver things 'dipped.' That's one of the results. Gorgeous, isn't it? Of course, it's only plate."

"It looks like Benvenuto Cellini!" declared Alice.

"That was the intention. I always like those queer Italian curlycue things—" Suddenly she

broke off. Alice was looking straight at her and Enid was truly an honest little soul. "Oh, Alice," she burst out, "I feel all at odds and ends! I don't know what's the matter with me, but I'm on edge, and uncomfortable and—I wish I were dead!"

She suddenly began to cry—though she had not shed a tear before. Alice scowled at her a moment in worried tenderness and then got up, stalked over to the chaise longue, and gathered her consolingly up in her strong arms. Alice went in for athletics and could play the Amazonian type very well.

There was no playing about this, however; Alice really loved Enid and she could see that Enid was dreadfully and unaccountably upset. Anybody, almost, could see, and Alice was decidedly better than "anybody."

"Honey," she said coaxingly, as she cuddled Enid. "What's the matter with Jack Radnor?"

It sounds vulgar and slangy; but it was the earnest expression of Alice's highly affectionate heart. Enid hid her face against her friend's shoulder, and began to cry.

It all came out then with a rush—the story of the mountain top and the midnight madness that had thrilled, yet revolted her. As she told Alice about it, it all seemed clearer and less jumbled than it had in her own disturbed memory. Not only could she see with a deeper flush of shame her own incredible weakness where Martin Hale had been concerned, but she could see with an even more troubled perception what he still might mean to her. She knew for the first time the ageless spell which we call sex and which may be dissociated from sense and sentiment alike. She spoke of the mountain man with a sort of awe;—it was he who had opened up to her this new and perilous complication in a complicated life. Yet she knew she did not love him.

"He was—extraordinary!" said Enid, in a secret sort of voice.

Alice nodded. She understood. Because she understood, she spoke, as it were casually, playing about among costly trifles that lay upon the table close at hand.

"I know. Funny how a new thing strikes you,

—all at once, as it were! And after all it isn't a new thing at all!"

Enid leaped at that, the light from the shaded electric lamps so thrown that her golden eyes glowed and her soft face was idealized by a mist of romance.

"That's just it!" she proclaimed, almost excitedly. "He *was* extraordinary. And yet—as you say—it wasn't a new thing at all! It's turned my whole life upside down, and I don't know where I am,—no, I don't know even *what* I am!"

Alice scowled, patted and smiled. She was sane and human. Her normal impulses and judgment had never been submitted to quite the atrophying process Enid had known. But she had a quaint good sense all her own. It had made her the outspoken lovable creature she was,—a girl of the world, who could make allowances for the freaks of the world and those of inherent human nature as well. Out of the wisdom of her twenty comfortable years, she spoke and Enid cuddled closer to her, finding a certain comfort in the very notes of her warm unhurried Southern utterance.

"Say, honey," said Alice Baker, after a thought-

ful silence. "I reckon I've often seemed a weird sort of animal to you-all—you being brought up North and all that—and I'll admit that there's a whole lot that we old-time Southerners take for granted that we find a heap oftener in Northerners than in our own folks. But there's one thing Southern girls *do* get a line on early"—Enid loved her mixed idiom—"and that's men, honey lamb. Maybe it's sort of undignified calling 'em 'things,' but anyhow you know what I mean. Since I was a youngster, I knew men were all just youngsters, too, and that the women that knew it were the women who'd win out! Say, darling, am I getting on your nerves, chattering and gibbering like this?"

"Rather not!" Enid was reduced to a candid procedure which she liked while it embarrassed her.

With a sort of triumphant rush of outwelling honesty she flung her gauntlet down before Alice.

"I nearly ran away with him! I'm not a bit sure that I wouldn't feel the same way again if things happened to work out like that. Stop looking at me like that! I'm just telling you the truth. I've always wanted something that I

couldn't get. I don't know what it is exactly, but I know Martin Hale can give it to me, and I know I'd rather have it from Jack than—Heaven! —from any one else. Only I can't. Jack would think it all quite horrid. And I dare say it is."

"Men are queer!" ruminated Alice Baker, as she picked up Enid's forgotten cream-lace cap and put it on the table. "They butt in on other chaps' preserves, gunning for game that they could get on their home estate! And I don't reckon that we girls are a bit better. We never know when we're well off, and we're always looking for trouble,—even when by a queer chance trouble isn't looking for us!"

The world detests violent interruptions, and yet the world would very quickly go to seed without them.

So it happens quite naturally and rationally that Enid's maid should put in her appearance at about this point with:

"The young lady says she must see you, Miss. I tried to put her off, but—" Enid rose nervously.

"Of course!" she said.

Already she knew who was to face her. Something deeper than apprehension shook her.

"Show her in," she said.

Polly Mason, pale and lovely, stood in the doorway.

CHAPTER XVIII

PREPARATIONS

Thou who with hermit heart
Disdains the wealth of art,
And gauds and pageant weeds, and trailing pall,
But comes't a decent maid,
In Attic robe arrayed,
O chaste, unboastful nymph, to thee I call!
—WILLIAM COLLINS.

)OLLY had evidently screwed her courage to the sticking point. There was something most pathetic in the bravado with which she me forward. Almost at once Enid knew there ould be a pretext—a subterfuge. It came oner than could have been expected. Miss lason drew something from the pocket of her ose coat.

"Your glove," she said. Enid had a sensitive stinct to accept the silly explanation. She put ırth a hand courteously. But Alice laughed out-

right. And something artificial in the situation was blown away by her clean rush of honest laughter.

"Will you please forgive me," she said, in those same warm tones so hard to resent, "but did you come all this way to give Miss Forsythe that glove?"

Polly turned on her. They were almost of a height and size, and far more nearly of the same temperament than Enid.

"Of course, I didn't!" she flashed. "Do I look like a fool?"

Again Alice Baker laughed—this time delightedly.

"You bet you don't," she retorted, with characteristic slanginess. "You look stunning!"

Polly had never looked so lovely. A rough dark cloak was about her and above it her face was exquisite, tragic and beautiful in its appeal. With a simple dignity that recognized and met the situation she went toward Enid.

"Martin Hale is in danger," she said quietly, but with just a catch between her words now and then. "It was partly that that brought me. But,"

she looked from Enid to Alice with great appealing eyes, "I don't reckon he's in much danger *now*. It was—something else."

Neither answered, knowing that she would go on. She did, breathlessly.

"All my life I've wanted the things that you-all are born to. I've wanted fine clothes—*and I can wear 'em, too!* I've wanted a place—a great bright place to be glad in. I—" She stumbled over the words. "I want to go to that ball to-night, if I die to-morrow."

No one stirred for a moment and the mountain girl clasped her hands tensely.

"I know," she said restlessly, "that I sound wild, but— Oh, you don't know—you can't know how I've wanted—how I've dreamed of something like that! I know I belong to another world from you-all——"

She hesitated, looking from one to the other of them piteously. Enid could not answer, did not know how to. It was Alice who put in swiftly and with honest force:

"I should rather say you *did* belong to another world—a much nicer one than ours, my dear girl!"

Enid hesitated, half-puzzled, but Alice Baker made a quick movement forward, and flung her arms around Polly.

"Don't you see," cried Alice, "she must have her chance! She must go to the ball!"

Polly's eyes were like big dark stars.

"You do understand!" she gasped, amazed.

"Of course, we understand!" Alice Baker exclaimed and the whirlwind of her response swept Enid along with it. "You're a splendid thing, child, and you're going to be the 'Queen of Hearts.' You were meant to be—for to-night, anyway. Isn't she, Enid?"

Enid nodded, deeply flushed. There was a terrible sense of guilt on the part of both herself and the mountain girl. Each had tampered with the other's legitimate lover; they could hardly meet each other's eyes.

"Come!" said Alice briskly. "We must dress her up. My clothes will be just the thing. You're built something like me, child,—only infinitely better!"

There was a great business getting Polly into

Alice Baker's things. Alice was the only one who was wholly jubilant. Enid was too engrossed in her own problems and Polly too terrified and thrilled by the present triumphant situation to experience an unalloyed joy. But Alice was minded to take advantage of this unexpected yet fortuitous happening to steal a little extra time with Ralph Denby unknown to anyone. Hence did she enthusiastically deck Polly out in her own raiment, executing small steps of exultation behind the backs of every one except Enid's maid, who was a wise soul and saw through her, yet contrived to remain discreet.

Alice's dress was of a deep rose-red which suited Polly's dark loveliness quite as well as her own. After she had been hurried into it—the hooks straining a bit, because of her fuller and more natural development, the other women gaped at her until she blushed.

"No rouge needed here!" proclaimed Alice. "What a color—ye gods!"

"But later?" suggested Enid. "You know lots of us have a color at the beginning of the evening; it's the excitement, but later——"

"For her—" began Miss Baker, but Polly's rich tones swept in ahead of what she would have said.

"For me," she said, "it will be all excitement. And—the color will last."

The French maid murmured something that sounded like " 'vous crois bien," but they were all too keyed up to count their own or each other's words.

"But what are *you* to wear?" Polly remembered to ask.

"Never you worry about me!" declared Miss Baker with a splendid pirouette. She had, as has been mentioned, her own plans.

When the maid tucked a big towel about Polly's superb shoulders and started to apply cornstarch, "No!" exclaimed Polly, suddenly. "I don't want the powder."

"Why not?" demanded Miss Baker, in astonishment.

"I don't know why," said the hill girl rather awkwardly, "only—it just doesn't go with *me.*"

Alice surveyed her critically. "You're right,"

she said, after a moment or two. "It doesn't. My dear child, I think you're an amazing egotist. You know so jolly well that you can't approve of —yourself."

Polly was not listening to the words, but she recognized the tone as not unkindly. The crimson in her cheeks came and went and she looked at herself in the glass with a shy interest in her lovely eyes.

Enid was already dressed. She had accomplished it subtly, hastily. She had not powdered her hair, but otherwise she was ready for conquest in pale blue. The thought had come to her that she would like to see Jack Radnor before Polly appeared before him in that amazing and conquering glory. She was ashamed of the petty jealousy, but—there it was. Having a suite of several rooms, she slipped out unnoticed, while the maid was dressing Polly's hair and Alice was cutting bits of black court-plaster for the final touches.

"There!" Enid heard Alice say, as she slipped away, "this bit close to your mouth, and this under one eye, and this on your neck——"

A primitive jealousy blazed in Enid as she went quietly out. Her neck! Of course, the girl's neck was splendid, but——

She went brazenly down the hotel corridor to do what she had never done in all her well-ordered life, to see a man in his rooms Radnor's quarters were on the same floor,—a rather pretentious suite where she and her mother had had tea once or twice. At this hour he would be almost sure to be alone. Her heart pounded, but she stole on, hushing the swish of her silken skirts.

She met nobody on her way and stopped, trembling, at his parlor door. With a shaking hand she tried it,—she was afraid to knock and in a second it was ajar. She wondered if he were dressing, and if she need be afraid of his man. Then she stood transfixed. For inside came Ralph Denby's voice, clear and unmistakable: "We'll get him to-night." Jack's followed: "I'm sorry you've got it in for Hale, Ralph. I think he's a decent fellow."

"He's in with the bunch. He'll go to jail if Dad and *I* can do it."

Enid was a modern girl, but she had nerves—

nerves keenly strung up to-night. She gasped faintly, but, as it happened, audibly.

Before she could get away from the door it had been flung open. As she confronted Jack Radnor a sort of joy touched her. She loved him so, in spite of her vagaries! She moved instinctively toward him, and his response was as eager as she could have wished.

"Enid! Was there anything you need me for? Is everything all right, dear?"

If Ralph Denby and the valet had not been there she might have thrown herself into his arms, asked him to admire her dress, confessed her jealousy of Polly,—who knows what? As it was, she cast wildly about in her mind for a good excuse for her highly unconventional presence. Then, moved partly by that discretionary and self-protective impulse, and more by a sincere anxiety, she cried:

"Is Martin Hale really in danger?"

Jack Radnor's face hardened to stone—or rather to bronze, since that was his coloring. His brown eyes sharpened and chilled until all the warm golden light had gone out of them. He

drew away and looked at Enid as though sh
been something less than a stranger.

"He is most decidedly in danger," he
Then a passing glitter leaped into the brown
"So *that* is why you are here!" he said.

Sick and cold and shaking, Enid turned
him blindly and fled along the corridor. T
her soul from torment she could not ha
plained—she could not have explained.

CHAPTER XIX

ENID: LADY ERRANT

. . . Good at need,
Mount thee on the wightest steed;
Spare not to spur, nor stint to ride,
. . . .
Say that the fated hour is come.
—Sir Walter Scott.

THE doors in the Forsythe apartment did not only connect, but all opened into the corridor, so Enid was able to slip back into her own bedroom without being seen or heard. It was in her dressing-room that the other three girls were still chattering and "preparing for the party."

Enid was a curious girl,—very elemental at heart; very correct outside. Her revulsions and reactions were peculiar and were controlled by in-

side moods and outside impressions. To-night a primitive impulse had taken her down the hallway to her fiancé's quarters. Flung back upon itself, that primitive impulse, curdled by the bitterness of her passing experience, urged to a plan of action entirely unthought of by her heretofore.

Martin Hale was in danger!

This was the point which leaped up paramountly before her mental vision. The picture of him—the mountain god—as she had trembled before him in the midnight hours on the mountain top appeared before her there in her perfumed, half darkened bedroom. His coming, even spiritually, was incongruous,—vaguely shocking. She felt her face burn and did not know where to look. But the fact must be faced; he was in danger.

Of course she knew that it was her duty to go straight in to the girl in the other room, the girl dressing up even at that moment in the rose-red gown, the girl who had a right to him, and tell her. But—she *wouldn't!*

There was something in her that made her determine to do what was to be done herself. She

knew the way to the Four Trail Crossing and surely old Mason would be able to communicate with him. There was a savage sort of exultation in the thought that she—the "lady," supposed to be even now resting before her conquests at the Powder Ball,—should win out over Polly, the girl of the hills on ground where Polly and not she rightfully belonged. Enid felt suddenly liberated, exhilarated. Whether Martin Hale was really the man for her or not, she was about to embark upon an enterprise which conventional girls did not as a rule consider. She was not going to any Cotillon Poudré; she was going alone into the mountain fastnesses at night, to try to save a man's life—or at least his freedom. The fierce, adventurous spirit in her gloried that no one was going to know her mission. She was going unaided, unadvised. But—*she was going!*

She walked casually into the dressing-room. She could only reach her riding clothes by crossing it.

"What's the matter?" said Alice Baker, turning, and staring at her friend's white little face. "You look as though you had seen a ghost."

"How do you know I haven't?" asked Enid, a trifle hardly. She was in the mood when one must be either hard or emotional. She preferred the former.

"Because," said Alice, "ghosts have aristocratic tastes and don't patronize hotels."

"I suppose," said Enid, with a desperate sense of protecting herself, "that ghosts are like other creatures and go where they can find the best hunting."

"Enid!" exclaimed Alice, staring. "You don't sound or look a bit like yourself."

"Isn't that comforting?" said Enid calmly. "Oneself is nearly always such a dull sort of person."

Before Miss Baker could put in any other disconcerting word, she added, smiling at beautiful flushed Polly in the dress that matched her cheeks. "Do you mind my telling you how exquisite you are, Miss Mason?"

Polly's flush grew a bit too deep for perfect beauty, but Alice said lightly:

"She's going to be 'belle of the ball!' Look out for your laurels, Enid!"

"Oh, no!" said Enid, with that sharp thrill of triumph known only to a woman when she really bests another. "I'll leave my laurels to her. I'm going to look after—*hers!*"

Wherewith she vanished from the room.

"What on earth did she mean?" said Alice Baker, knitting her brows. She turned on Polly, "Did you understand?" she demanded.

"I didn't understand the words entirely," said Polly, with bowed head. "But I—I reckon I understood the—the idea."

Alice stared a little more.

"I swear you're all the worst lot of puzzles I ever struck!" she declared impatiently. "I wish any of you could just stick to one line for five minutes! But, there, child, pin up the curl over your right ear, and be careful to mince a bit as you walk. You're so gorgeously strong and free that you might spoil the picture. Walk across the floor now."

Polly strode splendidly across, her round long lines swinging and curving into exquisite poses as she moved.

"No—no!" exclaimed Alice Baker. Then she stopped and surveyed Polly all over again.

"Yes!" she said. "Do it like that! No one here has ever seen anything half so beautiful."

A minute later Enid, having more or less prepared her way, sauntered back into the dressing room. Her maid was watching her this time.

She walked into the large closet at the further end of the dressing room, and quickly and silently selected a complete outfit of riding things. As she did so she could hear Alice and Polly laughing together over the difficulty of placing one particular court-plaster patch upon the snowy shoulder blade.

Turning, with her arms full, she confronted the horrified face of her own maid.

"Mademoiselle!" she gasped. "What——"

"Chut!" hissed Enid, imperatively. "These things must be taken into my bedroom. No one must know." Even in the dimness her eyes were compelling. The woman loved her, anyway.

"One moment!" she murmured. Then she seized a big wrapper of velvet and fur from a near-by hook and, taking Enid's burden into her

own arms, covered it effectively. They went out of the closet casually, carelessly. Enid stopped to tell Polly how charming she looked; the maid passed on unobserved into the other room. Then Enid followed her and in dead silence and a faint light changed her dress.

"Mademoiselle is no—going into danger?" whispered the maid.

Enid laughed under her breath. Already the sting of the adventure was whipping her blood.

"I don't know!" she whispered back, almost gayly. "These things are in the hands of the gods, Augustine!"

"I would rather," said the Frenchwoman sincerely and irrepressively, "that they were in the hands of—Monsieur Radnor!"

Enid chilled and stiffened.

"You need not 'rather' anything," she said, with a sort of hushed asperity. "I am going out and no one—not even Madame, is to know anything about it. Anyway," she added, with a momentarily returning gleam of humor, "you don't know where I am going, so you couldn't tell them anyway."

"As if I would, Mademoiselle!"

"You might not!" returned Enid, softening. "Anyway, talk to no one of my going."

"And—M. Radnor?"

"M. Radnor last of all."

"But if Mademoiselle did not come back. If there were—if there might be trouble—then I am free from my promise and may speak?"

"I suppose so," said Enid indifferently, as she moved warily towards the door. She laughed noiselessly and slipped out.

Augustine stood still in the center of the room nodding her head silently. Then she murmured to herself with unaffected relief, as though carrying on the conversation. "*Then* I may speak—and to M. Radnor *first* of all!"

A minute later she shivered, and glanced toward the window. It was already dusk, but a curious half glow, almost more illuminating than light, lay on all things.

"Dieu nous garde!" muttered Augustine, crossing herself. "A thunderstorm is on the way!" She trembled from head to foot. Augustine was afraid of thunderstorms!

CHAPTER XX

BEFORE THE STORM

Before a midnight breaks in storm,
. . . . . .
Ye know what wavering gusts inform
The greater tempest's path!
Till the loosed wind
Drive all from mind,
Except Distress, which, so will prophets cry,
O'ercame them, houseless, from the unhinting sky.
—RUDYARD KIPLING.

Comes a vapor from the margin, blackening over heath and holt,
Cramming all the blast before it, in its breast a thunderbolt.
—ALFRED TENNYSON.

UP through the brooding silence Enid rode. The heaviness of an impending storm was upon her. It seemed as though even her horse breathed in more labored fashion than was natural. It was not long past seven o'clock. Below, the valley lay in gloom; the great gorges, or

gaps, as they were called in this region, had a strange, almost a ghostly look. They were full of shadows, and a purple-gray light—if such a tint could be called light—lay on all things. No mist. What vapors there might be appeared to have been drawn up into the massed, cumulous thunder-heads that piled the heavens with their looming menace.

A flock of birds wheeled sharply across her path. It looked as though they were flying low because they cowered under an impending peril. So that was what it meant, Enid said to herself, "Swallows flying low." Did the winged creatures really sense a tangible pressure above them, forcing them down, hampering yet goading their wings to this earth-bound, panic-stricken flight.

She pushed onward, upward. There was no wind. The air was dead and dull. What life there was she felt to be psychical, in abeyance, like an electric dynamo temporarily stilled. Her face was hot and wet, and she wiped it mechanically. So! She had been as spent as that? Her mount too was lathered, though she was too good a horsewoman to have forced him unduly.

Once, in a tunnel, she had had the sense of a bursting pressure on her ears and brain. Then it was physical. Now, she had much the same feeling, though it must, of course, be largely mental, if not entirely so.

Her nerves were drawn tense, and light sounds, like the stir of leaves or a pebble under her horse's hoof, rang through her head until the exaggerated persistence appertained to the impressions of high fever.

Startled more by her own strained condition than by anything else, she reined up and, breathing deeply, collected her thoughts.

It was very quiet here among the hills—so quiet that, as has been stated, the lightest echoes sounded disproportionately. On one side of her, the left, was a sheer fall of mountainside that flanked the trail. Distances immeasurable lay before her that way. But they were distances that terrified. She who was singularly free from feminine attacks of vertigo shivered, turned her head away, and looked for comfort to the closely overhanging rock ledges and parapets on her right. At first the rising hill gave her panic a

lull; it was so immensely solid, so settled! One could cling there forever, even if eternity itself yawned on the other side but a few feet away. Then, flung back upon itself, her terror took a new form—rather an added one. If the vague deeps on the one side suggested the unfathomable, so the somber heights on the other proclaimed the unscalable. She felt herself an atom shivering between two implacable alternatives.

The fear was momentary, and escaping it, she bent low over her horse's neck and urged him recklessly up the narrow trail. The clatter they made was frightening but, for her, salutary. When the mount had clambered into the summit of the Ridge, Enid had her nerves as thoroughly in hand as her reins.

Then it was that the first heavy throbs of thunder shook the whole range like the blows of Vulcan at his Forge.

Looking up, Enid saw that all at once, the low sky had swooped even closer. The Valley was black. Far under the piling clouds a dead-white ghostly glimmer showed to her the horizon lay—somewhere in West Virginia. . . . A voice spoke

in the trees about her, the voice of the wind. It was a tone new to her: not the soft caroling of summer afternoons, nor the loud knocking of fierce tempests, nor the low wail of melancholy rains, but a pertinacious, deadly undertone like the hushed tuning of an individual instrument of a great orchestra just before an immortal symphony is to begin.

A swift, short light-blue glare made her horse rear. But she quieted him.

She had dreamed she knew what lightning was before. But this was like the rending asunder of a merciful veil, showing suddenly the blaze of Hell or Heaven, she could not say which.

After it, the thunder rolled, pulsed, and died away among the hills. Again the wind wailed in semi-darkness—for what?

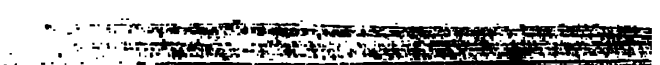
And her horse was trembling. She patted his neck, hardly knowing what she did. What was going to happen to them both?

On the Ridge, the sky seemed within touching distance, and blue-black. Panting, white and soaked with the cold sweat of a terror which she could not as yet analyze, she looked from the

right to the left of her. On the Warm Sulphur Springs side, the view opened clear and sharp—the sharper apparently for the weird half light. On the right—on the far edge of the rippling lower ranges, was a blur. Mist? As yet she had seen no mist in the valleys. Yet the clouds seemed unaccountably merged into the earth in one broad patch. One broad patch—was it not widening—drawing nearer?

Fascinated, she stared at it. It was advancing like a square of vaporous curtain stuff blown strongly onward toward her. It had the look of a half-washed slate—lighter in tint than the cloud-stuff above. And it was coming quickly, quickly. And it came, the curious low note in the trees about her grew faintly sharp, and shrill; a breeze, ice-cold and definite, as though from a hand, touched her cheek. Up from the valleys on either side of her rose a great damp, chilly breath. . . . The blurred patch was coming closer. And as she stared, frightened, yet thrilled, she saw a shiver of white across the vast wooded mountainside on the other side of the Valley land on her right. The silver tremor made her pause

Enid, riding madly along the ridge, was racing one of the great mountain storms



and marvel until she realized what it was. Then, with a gasp, she struck her horse sharply with her crop and darted headlong along the bleak Bridge Trail.

It was a great wind that bent the forests there beyond until they were silvered and tremulous beneath it: the big wind that heralds those moments when the elements rise laughing to assert themselves in the face of civilized power and control. The blur that, coming straight and relentless from the horizon, now seemed to blot out almost all the world, was rain—a cloud-burst probably.

Enid, riding madly along the Ridge, was racing one of the great mountain storms.

CHAPTER XXI

MEN

They have looked each other between the eyes, and there they found no fault,
They have taken the Oath of the Brother-in-Blood. . . .
—RUDYARD KIPLING.

JACK RADNOR parted from his friend Ralph Denby at the door of his rooms, and without being in the slightest degree conscious of the process, permitted himself to be helped into his evening coat.

Jack Radnor was, as has been said before, a very primitive man at heart. To this fact he owed much of his charm, for there is no more delightful creature than the cave-man with irreproachable manners. No one not born with the elemental fires in his make-up ever learns the true control of flame. Bloodless men and women of

breeding and of the world are like dead pearls, perfect, but with neither sparkle nor great value: primitive persons—also of breeding and of the world—are like those same pearls imbued with a living blaze that makes them prismatic, arresting, beyond price.

Standing with every muscle rigid, as his man brushed imaginary dust from his coat, Radnor experienced two choking emotional desires—one to follow Enid and wrest the truth of her own feelings out of her by violence if necessary, the other to find Martin Hale and kill him for having, even momentarily, arrested her interest. But he made no outward demonstration and probably had never looked cooler nor handsomer in his life. Only, as he stared at himself in the glass, he could see a pinching pallor about his lips and a glitter in his eyes which were something of a self-revelation.

"So that's what I am!" he reflected, unclenching his hands and feeling his palms wet and cold, "a brute beast, with just about the same feelings as a wild boar!"

His own self-contempt stung him, but had no

power to shake that bitterly savage secret mood. He was jealous—sickeningly, maddeningly jealous, and there was not a nerve nor muscle in his body that did not ache with the grip of it.

"A boutonnière, sir?"

Jack stared at the man as though he had suddenly been recalled from a great distance. A boutonnière! It seemed like a particularly silly joke, in his present frame of mind. He laughed, not very pleasantly, and the man started. He had been with Radnor since he left college and knew every inflection in his voice. There was something out of tune about that laugh. "There is a gardenia, sir," he said, soothingly, "or if you would rather have a few violets, or——"

"Have you any mountain laurel?" asked Jack, sardonically.

Ware tried to conceal his instant fear that his master was ill or had lost his wits.

"I—I imagine it could be obtained, sir," he said, even more placatingly.

Again Radnor laughed, but there was a more human note in it this time. He was fond of the man. All at once he realized that the bouton-

nière was only one of a thousand symbols of the control which the civilized man places over the cave-man within him.

"Let's have the gardenia, Ware," he said, gently.

The waxen white flower lay cold and perfect against the black of his coat: it set a sort of final seal upon his acceptance of the conventional world and its ways. He did not like gardenias, but the Lord knew they were symbolic! And the very perfume of this thing emphasized what he was trying to keep in mind,—self-mastery, gentleness, courtesy, good breeding, chivalry.

Suddenly he felt tired and depressed. If Enid did not care—and he could hardly persuade himself now that she had ever cared—what a meaningless business it all was! He might as well chuck up everything and go west, or ship on a whaler, or——

"Atavism!" he muttered, half laughing to himself.

"I beg pardon, sir?" said Ware.

There was a knock on the door—rather an odd knock. When you come to think of it, there is a

good deal of individuality in the way persons announce their wish to enter. There is the obsequious tap of the servant, the light, confident touch of the intimate hand, the uncompromising thud of,—let us say,—the relentless bill collector. This knock was repeated twice; it was neither light nor loud. A man's hand had done it, and a man who was urgent and yet not excited.

When Ware opened the door Martin Hale stood looking in.

Jack suppressed an exclamation as he sprang forward.

"How on earth did you get here?" he demanded.

"Asked the fellow downstairs for the number of your room and came up," said Martin in his slow, unhurried way. The calm poise and dignity of the man had never been more noticeable.

"Did anyone see you?" said Jack, quickly.

"Quite a heap, I reckon," said Hale, without emotion. "Stared as though they'd never seen a flannel shirt before in their lives."

He grinned amiably.

There is one queer thing about men. Hate they never so viciously they keep a certain loyalty and freemasonry of sex all the time. Three minutes before Radnor had wanted to wring the mountaineer's neck. Now, with his enemy in immediate danger and facing it so coolly, he actually forgot his personal grievance and was filled with one idea—to stand by him. A woman is not often like that; she may help her rival out of trouble but she is silently conscious of her grudge all the while.

"Here—come in!" exclaimed Jack, almost peremptorily, and Hale swung his great, graceful bulk into the room. "Ware, close that door! Hale, you're running an awful chance coming here! Denby is out after you and every one in the place is tipped off."

"I know," said Martin laconically. "But I had to come. I've come for Polly Mason."

"Pol— But Miss Mason isn't here!"

"Yes, she is. She came down here this afternoon. Fellow told me he'd seen her coming into the hotel. I've got to find her."

He looked at Jack Radnor searchingly, then nodded his head as though satisfied.

"I reckon you don't know any more about her than I do," he said.

"I?" exclaimed Radnor, in surprise and then flushed darkly. "You thought——"

"I didn't think anything," cut in Hale. "Radnor, you're a white man. Help me out in this. I've got to get Polly."

Jack thought rapidly.

"If you asked for my room," he said abstractedly. "You can't stay here,—in my place, I mean."

"I don't want to stay here," Martin Hale said, interrupting him again. "I want to hunt for her."

Ware stood bewildered, gazing first at one man and then at the other. His well-oiled little world was going very rustily indeed. He could not understand its gyrations at all.

"I have it!" cried Radnor, with enthusiasm. "But no," he added, considering, "it would be too risky, I suppose."

"What?" Martin, as we know, was not given to wasting words.

"It only occurred to me," said Jack, "that if you could get into this Powder Dance we are having this evening, you could come and go as you liked without being noticed. Every one will be masked until midnight, and you could probably locate Pol—Miss Mason before that. Still, as I say, it's risky."

"It's all right," said Martin, without seeming to need time for deliberation. "I'll take a sporting chance anyway. But I'll need some clothes."

He looked down at his rough garments and then glanced at Jack's unexceptional evening dress.

"You know," said Radnor, "I think we're both mad—you especially!"

"I reckon so—sort of," rejoined Martin Hale, and smiled. But his face was drawn and anxious. "You see, it's this way: Polly's father's sick—one of his heart attacks. She's got to go to him, and I've got to take her."

"But—" Radnor was beginning when Hale stopped him.

"Hold on!" he said. "I know what I'm doing —just exactly—and I know what it means better than you do. So don't spring any 'buts' on me; they're an old story! If you can help me, do it! If not—" He paused, and his steady, unclouded gaze met Jack's.

"I can go to the devil?" supplemented the latter, but he was already tingling from the force of the other's persuasions and personality.

"Something like that!" agreed Martin Hale, nodding. "I'll manage it somehow anyway. Only this will be the squarest way."

For a moment the two men looked at each other. Then Radnor said, flushing darkly with understanding and masculine appreciation:

"By the Lord, you're a sport! Come on, man! I'll find you the war paint, and then—the game's up to you! Only—remember you can't duck me at the finish! I'm in with you to the last lap!"

And he gripped the hand of the man whom he had been yearning to murder but a short half hour before. It is also a fact, curious but unquestionable, that for that moment, much as he loved Enid, he had forgotten her very existence!

CHAPTER XXII

AT THE POWDER DANCE

. . . My mind misgives
Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels. . . .

—SHAKESPEARE.

IT was a Cotillon Poudré, which meant that the women dressed in powder and patches uniformly and the men did what they liked. There were five or six golf coats—hunting pink was taboo because the shade clashed with the cruder scarlet of the golf club. Here and there a venturesome male sported a domino or some vague attempt at a costume. But the girls were, one and all, arrayed in fluffy, pale-colored frocks, with their piled hair full of starch and court-plaster planted at alluring distances over their faces and shoulders.

The favor table was piled high with dainty trifles—most of them made by the women most concerned in the Cotillon. There were masks and snuff-boxes, tall canes and flower baskets, and —a pretty innovation started by Enid in the first place—wee lanterns by which each dancer could find his or her partner.

The table was presided over by five of the smartest women of the Smart Eastern Set. When Radnor led Martin into a side apartment opening into the main ballroom, it was introducing him to an atmosphere which many social climbers had longed to breathe in vain.

The ballroom at the Casino was very charming that night. It was not a general dance: a small committee of select dowagers had gotten it up and blue-penciled the invitations. As Warm Sulphur Springs, at certain seasons of the year, is almost as smart as Newport, Tuxedo and Aiken combined, an exclusive party meant not a few heart-burnings.

Persons counting on the *laisser-faire* of the average summer resort and reckoning the Casino to be a democratic and universal possession were

outraged to find that for one evening, once in a while it was as hard to enter as the Celestial Gates.

Martin Hale and Jack Radnor passed the receiving ladies, and Hale's bow was as deep and as courtly as the others. He carried his borrowed plumes with an air which was a never ceasing surprise to Radnor and the two or three other men who were in the secret. Fitting him out had been no easy task. Jack's own things were out of the question, for Martin bulked obviously larger than did he, so he had sought out Ted Meredith, ex-football star and amateur fighter, and justly proud of his depth of chest, breadth of shoulder, and length of limb. He was somewhat chagrined to find that his evening clothes could only be put upon the frame of the big mountain fellow at the imminent risk of bursting out at every seam. Eventually Nicholas Wayne rose to the emergency—a stolid young giant, with a huge, though not particularly athletic body. What Nick had in superfluous flesh Hale made up in hard muscle, and the suit did well enough. The effect was excellent—indeed, Jack feared it was

too noticeably so, for no one could have failed to look twice at the big, easily moving figure with the tawny shock of hair. That there would be many conjectures as to his identity was unavoidable. They could only hope that Hale would find Polly as early in the evening as possible and disappear with her before he was discovered.

Jack looked anxiously about for Ralph Denby, but could see no signs of him. With Hale he moved on past the favor table under the luminous softness of the colored electric lights.

"Who is that?" demanded Martin, and Jack felt the shoulder under his friendly hand stiffen to iron. He could not follow the other's gaze, because of the mask, but vaguely he turned in the direction toward which Hale was fronting. Immediately he noted the tall figure, the black hair, the rose-red dress, and remembered what Enid had told him about the prospective costumes for the evening.

"That's Alice Baker," he said at once, but even as he spoke he doubted his own statement. Martin put the doubt into words by returning swiftly:

"That? Never! That's Polly Mason!"

"You're crazy!" said Jack for the second time that night.

This time the mountaineer was less amiable about it.

"If that's not Polly, then I am crazy!" he said bluntly and stood still, stiffly at attention, watching the tall, masked girl in the rose-red frock.

Puzzled and fascinated, Radnor watched her, too. It was quite true that, like as she was to Enid's friend, in stature, dress and coloring, she was quite different in some obscure way hard to define. Her black hair was piled high on her proudly held head with no sprinkling of white. That, in itself, would be like Miss Baker. She was erratic and would doubtless, at a Powder Dance, choose to be a shining, unpowdered exception!

Yet the puzzle lingered. Alice was of naturally erect and free carriage, her figure was full and beautiful, she moved with ease and grace and energy. But here was—something more. The black-haired woman who glided in stately yet sinuous fashion down the alley-way of palms was to Alice Baker what the moon is to the arc light.

Not that Alice was artificial, but this was reality itself, personified, incarnate. It seemed to Jack Radnor that he had never seen complete natural freedom and beauty wedded to utter dignity and grace in all his life. Then his mind leaped back to the trail on the Ridge,—to Malone's shadowed cabin. . . . Yes, she had moved like that! But where had she learned this added subtle queenliness and ease? Was it part of her gown, her setting? Was it merely her wonderful adaptability, or was it that for the first time she found herself in the environment which best brought out her points, her finest values? At all events, there was no longer any doubt in his brain as to her identity.

"It's Miss Mason all right," he said simply to Hale. "I don't know where Alice is, nor what it all means, but—it's so! Do you want me to tell her you're here?"

Hale nodded, then drew a quick breath and shook his head. His outstretched hand fell on Radnor's arm.

"Just a moment!" he muttered. "I want to look at her! She—she's very beautiful, isn't she?"

The words were a question, as though he feared to trust his own vision. It was an odd question, too: a woman masked, and to call her beautiful. . . . Yet, gazing also, Jack understood. There was very real beauty in this masked woman —a beauty not merely of well-proportioned lines and curves and values, but a beauty of inherent personality, which made each slightest gesture of hers a symphony, each step a step in a sort of gently regal progress.

Suddenly Martin started forward.

"What are you doing?" said Jack. "Wait, and I'll get her to come to speak to you where people won't——"

"Wait! Not for a moment!" Hale strode straight to the side of the rose-hued figure and caught her hand in his. Jack saw her start and her other hand go to her breast. And even as he saw that, he saw something far more disquieting,—the form of Ralph Denby standing in one of the open doorways. He was adjusting his mask, according to the rules of the ballroom, but Jack knew him and his heart sank.

For only a moment Ralph Denby stood motion-

less, looking fixedly at the big, sunny-haired man beside the girl in the rose-red dress. Then he walked quickly up to him and laid his hand on his arm.

"Martin Hale!" he said sharply.

There was a little stir of excitement. Many of the people present had heard of the man whom the Denbys and Sheriff Heaton were trying to trap. The general impression was that he was a sort of bandit. Was it possible that this large, composed individual standing so imperturbably there in their flower-decked ballroom was the same desperate character who had led the hold-up on the Millionaires' Local?

Jack sprang forward. "Hold on a moment, Ralph!" he began.

The girl in the rose-red dress was panting hurriedly, more, it seemed, in excitement than fear.

"How do you-all know he's Martin Hale?" she cried, in a warm contralto voice unwontedly quickened by emotion. "He's masked."

"And no one unmasks until midnight!" said Jack, grasping young Denby's arm. "Be a sport, Ralph!"

"I tell you I know—" began Ralph hotly.

But the big man in the mask was speaking. His slow, indolent words carried to every ear there.

"I'm not telling who I am just at present," he said. "You-all can make out I'm one person or another. Suit yourself. But I've got something to say before you fix on *who* I am. I came here to-night taking right much of a chance——"

"I told you!" broke in Ralph.

"Wait!" muttered Jack Radnor.

The quiet voice continued:

"I came here, taking the chance of losing a whole lot of things folks like to hang on to—my liberty, for instance."

He paused a moment, then he turned to the girl beside him and with infinite gentleness drew her hand within his arm. Then he addressed the whole ballroom.

"This lady's father's right ill,—dying, maybe" —a choking cry came from her lips and he patted her hand—"and so I—well, I just came to fetch her, that's all. I want to see her safe with her father, and then—" He swung back to Ralph Denby, and his voice came with a quicker, harder

cadence, *"Then I'll come back here and unmask at midnight when the rest do!"*

There was a second's breathless pause and then one of the men gave an irrepressible cheer. It was caught up by dozens and the ballroom rang.

"Now, sir," said the masked stranger to Ralph, "do you-all ask me to unmask?"

Ralph turned away.

"At midnight, with the rest," he said briefly.

"I thank you-all, sir."

The tawny-haired man and the girl in the rose-red dress walked out of the ballroom. Jack went with them. Just outside he held out his hand to Hale, without a word. Their fingers met and clasped hard. To Polly, Radnor said:

"Good-bye, Miss Mason. My congratulations. He's the finest gentleman and the best sport I ever knew."

And Polly, crying and clinging to her lover's arm, knew that it was true. Whatever trouble might come now, she had found herself.

"Good-bye until midnight!" said Martin Hale to Radnor, and went away into the darkness with the rose-red gown glimmering beside him.

CHAPTER XXIII

ELECTRIC LIGHT AND LIGHTNING

Then dress, then dinner, then awakes the world!
  Then glare the lamps. . . .
. . . . . .
Thrice happy he who, after a survey
  Of the good company, can win a corner,
. . . . . .
  And look on as a mourner, or a scorner,
Or an approver, or a mere spectator,
Yawning a little as the night grows later.

—LORD BYRON.

RADNOR stood a moment staring after them. It occurred to him that he had not the slightest idea how they were going to get up the mountain; then he laughed as he told himself that Martin Hale was not likely to have neglected arrangements or preparations of any kind.

The rustle of a skirt beside him made his heart leap. For the first time in over an hour he

thought of Enid and turned eagerly in the hope that it might be she. But it was Alice Baker, not in costume but ordinary evening dress, with her mask dangling from her wrist.

"I heard it all!" she whispered excitedly, "and I think it's just perfectly thrilling. What a stunning couple they are! Is he as handsome unmasked as—Enid says?" she ended with malice.

"Quite, I fancy," said Jack, suppressing a desire to box her ears. "Where on earth *is* Enid, anyway?"

Alice looked at him in astonishment. "Don't *you* know?" she asked. "I thought, of course, she was with you."

"I! No: I've been too busy stage-managing Hale even to look her up. I supposed she was late, that's all."

"And I supposed that she had sneaked off to a corner of the veranda, the way I did, so that her best young man could come and talk to her undisturbed."

"Isn't she with her mother?" demanded Radnor, a little more anxiously.

"No: Mrs. Forsythe is at the favor table, and

she is looking all over for Enid. Peep through the window and you can see her."

Jack took a frowning survey of Enid's mother, who sat at the long table of pretty many-hued trifles, the picture of incarnate restlessness and worry—properly subdued for the occasion.

"*And,*" proceeded Alice irrelevantly, "that girl, that raving beauty from the top of nowhere, has gone off with my dress!"

"She'll return it," said Jack absently. He was thinking of Enid with more and more concern.

"*Return* it!" repeated Miss Baker with scorn. "And what will there be left to return, I ask you, after this storm?"

Jack started.

"I believe it *is* going to rain," he said, noticing the change in the air for the first time.

"He believes it is going to rain," repeated Alice, with open disdain. "My dear man, the storm has been growling and spitting like a wild cat for half an hour. Listen!"

Low and sullen the echo of the thunder came to them through the thick, damp night. It was indeed not unlike the snarling growl of some wild

beast chained far away, yet straining to break its fetters. The sky was black and close. The smell of the rain was in the air. As a matter of fact, it had been raining for some time on the mountain ridge less than two miles from where they stood.

"I wonder—" Alice was beginning, when a step checked her.

"Well, young people! Have you been playing 'Change your partners?' Where is my boy, and where is my little friend Miss Enid?"

Judge Denby, carefully dressed and groomed, and the picture of courtly, urbane, middle-aged dignity, stood beside them.

"You will forgive this?" he said, indicating his cigar. "I just came down from the hotel and wanted a breath of air before I went into that very attractive, but exceedingly warm-looking, ballroom. It is going to be a big storm, Radnor."

"I'm afraid so," said Jack, thinking of Hale and Polly on the trail. Lucky for him that he did not know Enid was out there, too, somewhere in the rain-threatened night!

"There is always something exhilarating to me

in these mountain storms," said the Judge, puffing comfortably. "They are so huge, so dynamic that they soothe one. One's very helplessness becomes restful—one's own small violences become as nothing compared with the great passions of the elements."

"If you'll both excuse me," said Alice Baker, abruptly, "I'll go to look again for Enid."

She slipped away quickly, and the Judge offered Jack his cigar case.

"Thanks, not now. Hello! That was a flash and no mistake!"

The storm held its breath, as it were, for a space. You might have fancied that it did so viciously, taunting the apprehensive earth as an animal tortures its prey, or as a savage postpones the sacrifice hour by hour to prolong his victim's fears.

The music from the ballroom, gay and sweet and seductive, drowned the snarl of the thunder, drowned the thud of the first heavy drops upon the roof. But a gust of wind blew boisterously in at one of the open windows and scattered a score of dainty favors. The next blaze of light-

ning was so close and so vivid that they could notice it even in the brightly lighted ballroom. A wild rush of rain drove the Judge and Radnor close to the wall of the Casino. In a moment the veranda was wet to within a foot of where they stood. The big trees about the Casino were sighing in great moaning gasps. Their bending leaf-loaded branches showed in the light that streamed from the windows. Some Japanese lanterns strung up for the occasion blew down and went scuttling off upon the wet gale.

"Well," said Radnor, "you may like mountain storms, Judge, but I always have a queer feeling of being up before the Judgment Seat when I strike a peach of a one like this. I'd hate to have any very black crime on my soul and face that lightning!"

He laughed, but the Judge did not laugh. Rather a strange look came over his face.

"I never thought of that," he said, half musingly. "What made you think of it—now?"

Jack laughed again. "I haven't the faintest idea! I was thinking that wickedness might serve as a kind of lightning conductor——"

"The—the rain is growing a little too much for a rheumatic old man," interrupted Judge Denby brusquely. "I'm going inside."

That evening was one which Jack Radnor never forgot. Enid could not be found. No one had seen her; no one knew even where—or whether—she had dined. Mrs. Forsythe and Alice had each believed her to be with the other. And yet the mother still had to smile and give out favors and talk platitudes with her associate matrons, and Jack Radnor had to dance with the girls who hadn't enough partners or whose mothers had asked him to week-ends and yachting cruises. And the storm raged with increasing fury outside so that the roar of the rain upon the earth could now be heard persistently through all the charming rhythms of the dances. The electric lights failed once, and there was a faint panic until two dripping electricians came to the rescue. The thunder sounded, as one girl said shakily, "like the ghosts of the big guns of the Civil War come back to haunt the place!" A general sense of nervousness seemed to pervade the dance. The laughter was a bit forced, and when a great glare

of blue would pour blindingly in through a window, women would shrink and gasp a little. Judge Denby even was not so debonnair as usual. His handsome, florid face was somewhat paler than its wont, and he talked less,—and less oratorically.

As for Jack, whether he danced or talked, sat out or purveyed refreshments, he was in a sort of daze of unreality. It seemed like a fantastic dream; as if all of them were actors in the nightmarish play of a madman. Once in a while his eyes met those of Mrs. Forsythe, and in both was the same mute question. Jack told himself that this anxiety was foolish. Enid had other friends in the Homestead Hotel, who had not come to the dance. She might have decided at the last moment to spend the evening with any one of them. She was extremely independent and erratic in her actions, and often even her mother had not the faintest idea where to look for her. Still——

Another thing gave the evening an element of subdued excitement. Every one was wondering if Martin Hale would return, as he had promised,

before the time came to unmask. As the time drew on toward midnight people looked often at the door. Radnor found himself with his watch in his hand every two minutes. Hale could, of course, make it if he had good horses, but it would be hard going. . . .

Twelve o'clock, and the unmasking had begun. Outside was by this time a solid wall of roaring rain that shut them in as though their gay little Casino were a prison.

"What preposterous tale is this," said Judge Denby to Jack, "about that ruffian Hale coming here and getting away again with some cock-and-bull promise of coming back? Really, I am deeply annoyed with Ralph!"

"Are you?" said Jack, in an odd tone. "Look there!"

A man, streaming with rain water, stood in the doorway. He wore a mask, which he removed even as they all gazed at him.

"I hope I'm not late," said Martin Hale.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE UNSIGNED NOTE

Night, and one single ridge of narrow path
. . . The woods
Waving and muttering, for the moonless night
Has shaped them into images of life,
Like the uprising of the giant-ghosts. . . .
—ROBERT BROWNING.

ENID FORSYTHE soon discovered that a mountain storm and a girl on horseback are not very evenly matched. The competition is decidedly unfair. Blinded and deafened by the rain, the lightning, the rolling thunderbolts, and the mad gale, all increased a hundredfold by the vast augmenting mountain tops, among which she rode, she was bent to her pommel, and shaken with cold and nervousness. Dauntless in spirits beyond most girls, she was, for the time being,

effectually beaten by this tempest. And with the sense of helplessness and defeat came a sick reaction from the mood which had sent her up the trail that night. What was she doing here, what good could she be to Martin Hale or anybody else,—she, this poor wretched, drenched piece of feminine humanity, drooping in her saddle and wishing from the bottom of her heart that she had never left the Valley?

But Enid was made of better stuff than she knew. She was not really beaten,—only baffled. With a fresh impetus her will and pluck would spur her on again. Meanwhile, all she longed for was a shelter. And she found it!

It was Malone's mountain shack, though she did not know that. When he was there he left a big, draught-proof, oil lantern burning to guide him home, and it was this yellow glimmer winking between the writhing, dripping trees of the Ridge that beckoned Enid with what at that instant seemed a blissful promise. Somewhere there was a light and a roof, and a respite from the relentless winds that tore at her with their cruel fingers. Sick with the ordeal of the last

half mile along the dreadful Ridge, she guided the horse toward the light, and in a few minutes more she was in the shack.

No one was there. Her first feeling was one of relief. Then she was sorry because she had hoped to find some man who could look out for her horse, which had suffered nearly as much as she. Then she sat down on a hard chair, covered her face with her hands, and tried to get her breath and her assurance back again.

It was there that the Fates sent her the impetus necessary to carry her farther on her adventure. On the table at her elbow was an open letter and, half-unseeing at first, Enid's eyes wandered to it.

The note was in a writing which she did not know,—a very forcible, clear writing, though in pencil. Enid would not have read it if she had not seen a sharp square "H" in the middle of it.

"H" suggested Hale,—and, almost mechanically, she read the words that immediately followed: *"He has been unmanageable lately."*

Then quite deliberately and with no qualms of conscience she went back and deciphered the whole

letter. It ran: *"Make it on the 27th. Word, Mountain Laurel. Look out for H. He has been unmanageable lately. If necessary, fix things on him. He'd be safer in jail."*

There was no apparent identity. Whoever had written those nonchalant and unscrupulous sentences knew that he spoke with authority, and that his briefest scribbled word would be recognized, understood, and obeyed.

So this was what it all meant! They were "fixing things" on Martin Hale, because he had become "unmanageable" and would be "safer in jail!" Enid had never heard the expression "frame up," but she grasped the significance of that curt, hasty note only too well. Her blood burned in her veins, with indignation and defiance. So they were trying to do that? Well, they shouldn't! They shouldn't! She would die first. The man who wrote that note should be exposed if it took her final breath, and her last ounce of energy.

She flung open the cabin door, all forgetful of the weather which had driven her to this strange shelter. But she was forced to stagger back

against the fury of the wind and rain which assaulted her. For a moment, clinging to the door, she felt hopeless and desperate. Even the elements were against her. Then, breathing hard, but thinking steadily, she made up her mind. This storm might rage for the rest of the night. It would doubtless be succeeded by days of heavy, unremitting rain. She knew by experience that at times weeks of black weather were in the mountains. In that case, there would be washouts and landslides and the trails would become steadily more difficult to travel. Places that were now only risky would soon be dangerous—if not impassable. The fords around the foot of the hills would be rivers; half the narrower paths would be washed away. Therefore, if she was to get to the Valley with the mysterious document that would seem to clear Hale and incriminate another man, she would lose and not gain by waiting.

She knew that the high Ridge Trail was perfectly safe, however terrifying to follow in this tempest.

She must ride up to it, then go not south but north,—toward the Toll Gate. Then, if the

lower road had already become treacherous, she would have to walk down to Warm Sulphur Springs, and hire some sort of trap to drive her over to the Homestead. This was a perfectly good plan. There was, indeed, only one thing against it,—a thing which she was to discover in a minute or so.

Closing the door she seriously prepared for her undertaking. She thanked Heaven that she wore a safety habit easily detached. She dropped it off, and stood a slim, boyish figure in high boots and knickers, which she wore under her riding skirt. She discarded her long coat, too; it was clumsy, and as she was certain to get drenched anyway it didn't make much difference whether it was through whipcord or linen shirtwaist. Her hat she then flung aside, and her heavy gloves. She had the paper in the bosom of her blouse, taking the precaution to wrap it first in one of the gloves, as a protection against the wet.

Then dressed as "light" as she reasonably could be, carrying only her slender crop, she boldly opened the door again and, staggering a bit from the force of the gale, went boldly out

to where her horse was fastened. But it was then that Fate played upon her one of her most unfriendly tricks. Just as she swung herself into the dripping saddle, a fresh access of tempest filled the heavens with flame and thunder. Her mount, just freed from the hitching-post, backed away frantic with terror, and plunged wildly down the heavily wooded mountainside,—in precisely the opposite direction from that which she had intended to take! She was powerless to control the beast, for he was half crazed by the lightning and thunder. In a moment, sick with dread herself, she saw that she must not stay on his back. At any moment she might be thrown, dragged from her saddle by the crowding shrubbery, bruised against a tree. And, if he kept up this plunging gait, he would almost surely go down. She took a deep breath, kicked her foot clear of the stirrup, and waited for the next terrific illuminating glare of lightning.

Afterwards, she could never tell just how she did it. It always seemed to her as though some one else, not herself, had actually experienced it.

But, somehow, as the maddened horse struggled

downward through that dense shrubbery, she flung up her arms and caught a great overhanging branch, black against the throbbing purple-blue light that filled the heavens.

In another second, she had drawn herself up to safety, and sat clinging and gasping there while her horse crashed away from her in the tempest and the dark.

The branch to which she was clinging swayed and shook in the high wind. In the intermittent lightning she took in the outlook. Just beneath her was,—oh, thank Heaven! she had not been it before!—a deep, ragged gulch as though a monstrous handful had been torn from the side of the living mountain. Had her horse gone into that? She could not know, but she grew dizzy as she thought what she had escaped. Then she began to plan once more. She turned and peered upward toward the cabin from which she had been borne by the maddened horse. There was the light she had left still faintly glimmering, but it looked tiny and far away. She must have plunged down a greater distance than she had guessed. She was debating with herself how to

get back, when something happened. It was a huge something,—so unexpected, so cataclysmic so sudden and horrifying that she did not at first know what it was. She only realized that the jagged blue blades quivering in the dark above her all at once became merged into one titan weapon of destruction, and after one instant of awful hesitancy fell violently. Not upon her,—though it at first seemed that it was really herself that had been struck. The crash of a great tree just above her, the blaze of a sharp flame, the smell of smoke, and then the smitten tree fell like a wounded giant in her direction. It missed the branch to which she was holding, but threw its mighty weight against the branch of the tree itself. She heard the crackle of bent and breaking wood, felt herself flung forward still clinging to the branch—out over the ragged black pit below. She had no time for terror. She clung blindly as the tree fell and she with it. But instinct working at the last without any conscious mental guidance, made her throw herself out and forward, clearing the thud of breaking boughs as they crashed to the ground. She picked herself

up after a few minutes, and at first she thought the storm had ceased, for she could not hear anything just at first. Then her senses came back as clear as ever, and she looked tremblingly on the wreck from which she had escaped. The impossible had happened. The fallen tree had carried her over that impassable gulch. It lay black and threatening before her, but she was safe on the other side! The huge trunk lay like a bridge across it. But she fled suddenly. Another and yet another crash told her that more trees had fallen between her and the shack close below the trail. She stumbled down the mountainside blindly, and after a thousand years came to a trail,—a very slight one blazed probably by woodcutters or other mountain folk. Along this she flooded in ankle-deep mud, heading as nearly as she knew in the general direction of Four Trail Crossing.

But Nature who performs miracles on occasion and gives us the strength and temerity to do and dare impossible things, eventually presents her bills. Enid had been through just about as much as even her last jot of reserve force could stand. The darkness, the wildness of the night, the

danger through which she had passed, the heavy going on the trail,—also, probably, her recent close proximity to the tree which the lightning had struck, all combined to leave her in a state of helpless exhaustion,—almost insensibility. Slowly and still more slowly she went forward, until the one great mercy overtook her. She staggered to the comparative shelter offered by a great clump of shrub oaks, crawled under them, and sank into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LEARNED JUDGE

. . . The statesman thus,
Up the steep road where proud ambition leads,
Aspiring, first uninterrupted winds
His prosp'rous way; nor fears miscarriage foul,
While policy prevails, and friends prove true:
But that support soon failing. . . .
. . . From his airy height
Headlong he falls . . . .

—WILLIAM COWPER.

THEY were assembled in Judge Denby's library, and it was a scant three-fourths of an hour later. A trap had been summoned and they had driven through the atrophying downpour to the Judge's house. A silence had wrapped them in the transit. It had seemed to Jack Radnor that the Judge had winced from the thunder crashes and lightning flares now and

again, but that might easily have been an impression created by his own overwrought nerves.

In the quiet scholarly library, with its shaded reading lamp and rows of austerely bound works, its heavy curtains and deep easy-chairs, the storm was farther away than in the gay casino. Here a sort of ascetic yet epicurean barrier had been raised against the rough things of the world. The powdered dancers in the ballroom might tremble at the thunderbolts of heaven; Judge Denby in his luxurious study need not even take count of them.

A certain nervousness, or at least illness of ease, in the Judge which had more than once obtruded itself upon Jack's consciousness during that curious evening slipped from him triumphantly as he entered his own domain. It was as though he passed instantly and with a sort of supreme relief and resolution into the picture or harmony to which he rightfully belonged. The color that appeared all at once in his pale, clean-cut face might have been a rush of returning blood and spirit, or the reflection of the deep-red portières. Whatever lent it, it gave him again his old win-

some air of authority and benignity in one. He glowed, in his sober, distinguished fashion, there in his characteristic and fine-flavored room. Friends and enemies must have admired him alike.

Present were his son Ralph, Martin Hale, the prisoner, old Sheriff Heaton, and Jack Radnor. It was to be a sort of informal inquiry pending the more strict legal proceedings, and it was largely due to Radnor that the Judge had consented to it. He protested that it was irregular, but consented under Jack's urgency, to consider the facts of the case out of court.

Martin Hale was as still as a statue. From the moment of his surrender and his conveyance to the Denby house he had said nothing. Radnor had a sense of furious sympathy with him. But now—just to show that men are as unreasonable as women—his interest in Hale did not drown his anxiety about Enid. He ached with the wild yearning to know if all was well with her. It never occurred to him to think that she had left Warm Sulphur Springs. He still flagellated his spirit by telling himself that he was an utter fool to be so upset. But it was nearly one o'clock, and

no one knew what had come to her. His frantic efforts to communicate with Augustine, the maid, had availed nothing. Either she was with Enid wherever she was, or she would not answer the telephone. Meanwhile, they sat in Judge Denby's study and the storm poured past them without like a swollen river washing its banks and all but carrying them away.

No one spoke for a minute; then the Judge's son sprang up with an angry backward fling of his shoulders and faced Martin Hale.

"So you're a liar both ways!" exclaimed Ralph, hotly.

Hale flushed darkly and his breathing was labored. However, he controlled himself enough to answer quietly: "I don't lie, Mr. Denby."

Ralph turned to the Sheriff.

"This man came to me on the Ridge," he said, indignantly, "and gave me warning of the train robbery. I can't imagine why he did it, unless he expected a reward of some sort——"

Hale made an angry movement, but again checked himself.

"Then," young Denby went on, "he went into

the rotten shooting game himself! Talk about doubled-dyed renegades and turncoats!"

"That's a lie!" burst from Martin Hale, furiously. "I'm no turncoat—to you anyway! I did give the hold-up plot away, because I thought it was only decent. I never told on one of the gang, and you know it, but I did warn you about the train, and, so far as that went, I was with you and ready to fight fair and square, though you may remember I wouldn't pull a gun on my old crowd. I've been straight with you and you needn't try any frame-up on me, pretending to prove I haven't!

"You've called me a liar without cause. Now I'll call you one *with* cause! It's a lie that I was in that hold-up, I tell you! I wasn't in the Valley at all that night!"

"Save your breath, man," Denby said contemptuously. "We know you were."

"You can't prove it!"

"No?" Ralph held out the revolver with the initials M. H. on it. "Isn't this your gun, Hale?"

"Sure," said Martin, "but I wasn't carrying it then. I lost it early and——"

"I had it," Jack interrupted. "And I suppose I dropped it in the mix-up."

Judge Denby entered the conversation for the first time. His kindly, handsome, almost unwrinkled face was lighted by just the suggestion of a smile.

"My dear Jack," he protested, "isn't that rather a wild tale? I don't mean—" he hastened to add, "that I don't believe you exactly—I should hate to have to go so far as that—but—well, I'm afraid we must have some proof other than your bare word that you were carrying Hale's revolver."

"But," exclaimed Radnor, bewildered, "Ralph knows that I was armed. I was with him that night, and he knows I shot——"

"But have you no revolver of your own?" persisted the Judge.

"Why,—yes," admitted Jack, utterly at sea. "Certainly I have one. But I don't carry it about with me on afternoon rides, though I think I'd better after this!"

He said the last words laughingly, but he was vaguely troubled. He could not imagine why

Judge Denby should doubt his word—should, it seemed, almost want to doubt it. Was he—it was ridiculous and yet Jack instinctively felt sure of it—trying to fix some undeserved blame upon Martin Hale? He looked at his friend, but Ralph was scowling in a puzzled way. If Jack could have known it, he was just as much at sea as himself. "Why in thunder," young Denby was thinking, "should he try to shield Hale like this?"

"Judge," said Martin Hale earnestly, "I was angry a minute ago, and I wasn't going to ask anything of you-all, but I reckon I was kind of selfish. There—there are people kind of looking to me, Judge, and so I reckon I better eat humble pie and tell the truth. I was right close in with a whole bunch of folks that you-all are after, but a right smart lot of 'em weren't any worse than I was." He paused, for never in his life had he had to talk as much as he had to-night. "Some of us went into it for fun, and the danger, and some because we were bred to it, and some because we were scared into it." Again he paused, but this time the pause suggested poignantly something which he might have said. What was it?

"Come, come, my friend!" interposed Judge Denby, not unkindly, but with a trace of testiness. "You aren't going to pretend that you were bullied into becoming a crook!"

"No, sir," said Hale quietly, meeting his eyes, "I don't reckon anyone was ever able to bully me—much—and I never was a crook. But there's a whole heap of things that can be said between those two facts. 'Tisn't bullying for a man to find out right soon where his safety lies; and 'tisn't bullying to——"

Jack Radnor suddenly sprang to his feet with a lifted hand. The Judge's servant was talking with someone just outside the library door. The sound of the voice had a curious effect upon the occupants of the room. Every one there recognized it. When the door opened they all knew the man they were going to see. It was Malone.

Small, brown, wizened and ugly he came forward laboriously, his arm in a sling, his face still seamed with lines of fretful pain.

"Just came to let you know, Judge," he began. Then he caught sight of Martin Hale and his jaw dropped. "You've got him!" he exclaimed.

Jack Radnor felt the tingling excitement that presages revelations even before one knows precisely what they are going to be. Here was Malone, the outlaw, the confederate of Mason and Hale and the rest, coming to Judge Denby's house at one in the morning as though he were a detective reporting a case!

"Malone!" he gasped. "How on earth do you dare to come here?"

"Why, didn't you know?" exclaimed Ralph, looking at him in amazement, "Malone is Father's right-hand man!"

"Is that right?" said Jack, with an odd flutter of his pulse. Somehow a number of things were becoming plain to him. "Is that right, sir?" he repeated, looking at Judge Denby.

The Judge's face was rather a curious study. The fresh color and pleasant look of it had somehow disappeared and a mask looked at them instead—something which obstinately refused to give them a single secret.

Malone peered at him with his little eyes.

"It's right, isn't it, your Honor?" he said with

rather a sardonic intonation. "If I'm not your right-hand man, who is?"

The Judge seemed to pull himself together with a big effort.

"Malone is certainly in my employ," he said, but his voice did not sound quite like himself.

"Ah!" said old Heaton. "Sort of private detective, eh Judge? But I guess he's double-crossed you." He shook his head as though in regret, and lifted his awkward, angular length from his chair. "I'm afraid I have to arrest him just the same—" He produced a pair of handcuffs.

"Judge!" shrieked Malone, "tell him that I'm your man, in your pay! Tell him I never double-crossed you! Tell him I——"

"Mr. Heaton," said Judge Denby, perceptibly paler, "I will vouch for Malone."

The Sheriff looked at him a moment, and again shook his head very gently.

"I wouldn't Judge, if I were you," he said. "We've got the goods. If I were you, I'd——"

Suddenly he stopped. For again there were voices at the door, women's voices this time in

pressing eagerness to enter. Radnor recognized one of those voices, and started toward the door. The Judge's voice stopped him.

"Just a moment, Radnor! Mr. Heaton, there has been a—a bad mix-up here."

"I think so," said the Sheriff, dryly.

"And I dare say that Justice—" the Judge gulped—"may have miscarried. I confess that I had my suspicions of Martin Hale, but I think I may have been wrong. Suppose you let both him and Malone go,—on the understanding that the outlaws of the Ridge disband?"

"On their word alone?" asked Heaton.

"Well," said Denby suavely, "purely as a magistrate and as a disinterested observer, I should be willing to take a chance on them. *I* will guarantee their word, Mr. Heaton!"

His magnificent air seemed to clothe him in purple and gold. The Sheriff stared at him in undisguised admiration. Then he uttered a cryptic remark:

"It's a good thing never to leave your nerve behind you when you go out—Judge, what you say goes!"

CHAPTER XXVI

MRS. FORSYTHE TAKES A HAND

A conscience for his own soul, not his realm;
A twilight conscience lighted thro' a chink. . . .
—ALFRED TENNYSON.

THE door swung open and precipitably passing the Judge's protesting servant, Mrs. Forsythe hurried into the room, followed by a young woman who was sobbing hysterically. She was Augustine, Enid's French maid.

"Judge Denby! Jack!" faltered Mrs. Forsythe, who was very white, but trying to maintain some composure. "I *had* to come! Augustine says—Augustine! Tell them! Stop crying and tell them at once!"

The girl addressed herself to Jack Radnor—whom she adored—and spoke with melodramatic gestures but evident sincerity: "It is, Monsieur,

that Mademoiselle—Oh, *le bon Dieu* guard her —Mademoiselle, at the very hour when they were preparing for the cotillon, *là-bas,* has done the so strange a thing!"

Jack could have wrung her neck for the delay. "For God's sake, what is it?" he demanded, whiter now than Mrs. Forsythe herself. "What did Mademoiselle do?"

"She dressed—Oh, Monsieur, but conceive it! At that hour, and with this storm coming on, though it is true that one could not know it then."

Jack groaned aloud. Was the woman wound up?

"She dressed—" Augustine could not help a dramatic pause—*"in her riding habit!"*

In the silence that followed the clamor of the storm mocked them. Radnor closed his eyes for a moment, visualizing his Enid, a mere little atom of precious, helpless life, whirled about somewhere in that inferno of rain and wind. Only for a moment. The next he was mechanically dragging on his raincoat and Hale, he felt dully, was helping him and putting his cap into his hand.

"Where?" he asked Augustine, in a sharp hard tone, very unlike his usual voice.

"Not the Toll Gate!" put in Hale, speaking for the first time. "I left there less than two hours ago, and she had not reached there."

"Where?" repeated Jack, looking at Augustine. But Martin's words had brought fresh lines into his face.

"Ah, but Monsieur! I do not know. That is what Mademoiselle said, that if I did not know I could not tell. She did not want anyone to know—unless, she said, if she should not return."

"But," broke in Mrs. Forsythe, wildly, "you have known this all the evening, Augustine! Why,—why didn't you let us know before? You did not even answer the telephone!"

"Ah, Madame," wept Augustine, "it is the *tonnerre*—the terrible thunderstorm! I always am afraid, and I have heard it is at such times death to go to the telephone!"

Jack did not wait for anything further, but dashed out into the darkness and the trap that was waiting for Mrs. Forsythe. In his rooms at the hotel he hurriedly changed while he was wait-

ing for a horse to be brought up from the stable, and Ware was more upset than ever as he saw the set sternness of his master's face. Of course, Radnor knew now what had happened. Enid had heard what young Denby had said to him about the plans for Martin Hale, and had ridden off like the headstrong madcap she was to carry him a warning in his mountain hiding place. What had happened to her no one could now hope to guess. He had sent the trap back to Judge Denby's house for Mrs. Forsythe and now left a note for her:

"I shall go first to the Toll Gate and see if she has reached there yet. Then I shall search. Try not to worry any more than you can help. J."

Five minutes later he was on the back of the best horse they had in the Warm Sulphur Springs stable, galloping straight and hard on the Warm Springs road. He knew that the trails by this time would be practically impassable, and had no mind to be delayed by washouts, so he took the longer way as the surest means to his end. As he rose

he thought of the amazing selfishness of mankind. He had seen Hale and Polly go out into the threatening storm with only a passing thought of their having difficulties. But Enid was another matter! Another? She was all that mattered in the world—even if, and the thought did leave a stab, she had gone without a word to warn another man. He wished that he had asked Hale more about the roads. It was unlike him, he knew, to start upon any enterprise so impetuously, with so little forethought and preparation. But then, never before had he faced anything like this. The girl he loved, lost or at least missing, in a raging storm at night among the mountain ranges and for six—no, nearly seven hours! The fury of the tempest in his own face even in the Valley suggested to him what it must be on the Ridge; the difficulties of keeping an easy seat even for his strong polo-trained muscles was some faint indication of what an ordeal it would be for a slender girl to ride against such a storm. Every time his horse plunged or reared at a thunderclap or a lightning flash, every time a wet hoof slid stumbling over a wet stone, he had agon-

izing visions of Enid thrown, or perhaps lying hurt—who knows where, among those cruel everlasting hills.

And as he rode with set teeth and a twisted heart, another expedition was setting out. Enid was making, in fact, about as much trouble as is practicable for one small maiden.

When Jack had plunged out of the room, Martin Hale had turned to Judge Denby.

"Am I free to go, sir?"

The Judge nodded. He was sincerely concerned, and now he went to Mrs. Forsythe and pressed her hand.

"Dear lady," he said, "I know how anxious you are, but I am sure unnecessarily so! Your daughter is an expert horsewoman, and——"

"I'm going," said Hale at the door. "I'll take the trail, for I reckon Radnor took the main road to get faster going. We ought to find her between us."

"I'll go, too," said Ralph Denby.

They were off in another moment.

"Judge Denby," said Mrs. Forsythe, suddenly, and wan and pale as she was there was a fire in

her eyes as vital as the fire of youth, "I am going after my child myself!"

"My dear lady—" began the Judge, in expostulation.

"I am!" she declared. "I have suffered enough during this dreadful evening. I won't suffer half so much if I'm *doing* something!"

"But you can't go alone!" Denby protested.

Mrs. Forsythe was fastening her wrap with that brilliant look still in her golden eyes—eyes so like Enid's own. She paused and looked at the Judge.

"Well," she said, "why don't you go with me?"

Judge Denby stared at her, when he walked across the room to his desk and began to finger some letters that lay there. His hand seemed to be trembling.

Malone was still in the room. He flashed his beady eyes into the Judge's own and said:

"Better go, Judge."

Denby started, and looked involuntarily at Heaton. The latter slowly nodded.

"The road beyond the Toll Gate leads to Middletown," he said, with seeming irrelevance.

"And there's nothing," added Malone, speaking also with no apparent reference to anything in particular, "like knowing the right time to do a thing."

The Judge looked from one to the other of them silently. Then he straightened up and took a deep breath.

"I think you are both right," he said. He hesitated, and added, "Thank you, Heaton." And he had never spoken with more dignity. "Mrs. Forsythe, I shall be only too delighted to accompany you to Four Trail Crossing, to look for your daughter."

He offered his arm and they left the room together. The two men inside looked at each other. After a minute Heaton spoke:

"No occasion for State's Evidence, Malone. I'd rather have it this way, I reckon. Your gang's busted, and I'm glad—well, I'm glad things turned out the way they did. Say!"— He helped himself to one of the Judge's cigars— "he's a thoroughbred all right! Have one of these? I reckon he won't be asking for 'em for some time!"

CHAPTER XXVII

ANOTHER DAWN

And round about his home the glory
That blushed and bloomed
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed.

—Edgar Allan Poe.

"THERE'S not been such a night here in fifteen years!" said the keeper of the Toll Gate.

He was propped up with pillows in a chair before the fire and Polly crouched beside him, her head against his arm. The heart attack had passed: when Polly had arrived hours before it was already over—but he still looked ill and weary. She had not taken off the rose-red frock lent her by Alice Baker; it was splashed and muddy about the skirt—even as Alice had known it would be! And her heavy black hair loosened

by the long drive to the Crossing had not been put up again but streamed like spilled ink upon her shoulders.

She shivered now, and pressed closer to her father's shoulder.

"Listen to the wind!" she murmured. "Seems like it'd lift us straight off the Crossing and blow us away, don't it, Dad?"

A great puff of smoke came down the chimney, and the whole house shook. The gust, passing, left a wail above the roof like the keen of a banshee.

"A wild night, a wild night!" muttered the Toll-keeper. "What's the matter, honey?"

For Polly was softly crying.

"It's Martin!" she whispered brokenly. "Dad, how will we know if he comes out of it all right?"

"He'll come out of it," said her father, with odd confidence. "Martin Hale is not going to be beaten, anyway around. And if the worst comes to the worst, *I* can take care of him."

"You, Dad!" She drew back and looked at him in astonishment.

He nodded.

"Yes. I've kept silence a long time, now. But I reckon I can talk if I have to."

The leaping fire showed grim determination in his face. She had no idea what he meant, but a sort of comfort came to her. She had abounding trust in her father. If he said that things were coming out right, she was sure that they would.

"Dad," she said, very low, "it's—it's lonely here at the Toll Gate, isn't it?"

He smiled and turned to look down at her face, rosy with something more than the firelight and the reflection of the red gown.

"Is it all right between you and Martin now, honey?" he asked.

She did not speak, but her hand stole up to touch his. The Toll Keeper nodded his head wisely.

"The trails get crossed now and then," he said, addressing the fire, "but we can usually find our own if we keep our eyes open."

The clock struck three and almost with the moment of its striking Jack Radnor came into the

Toll Gate House without even knocking. He was breathing hard and dripped rain like a living fountain.

"Enid—Miss Forsythe?" he demanded.

"Great heavens, man, you look as though you'd been drowned!" cried the Toll-keeper.

"Did she come here?" went on Radnor unheeding.

The Masons both shook their heads. A sort of tense look in Jack's pale face gave way to such a reaction of discouragement and anxiety that the old man hastened to add:

"But maybe she couldn't have gotten here yet? When did she start?"

"At seven o'clock last night," said Jack drearily.

Polly suppressed a little cry.

"Tut! Tut!" sympathized the Toll-keeper soberly. "That's bad—and she was headed for Four Trails, Mr. Radnor?"

"I don't know." Jack told the few facts he did know, and could not help noting even in that moment of stress, that Polly's lovely face paled and stiffened when he spoke of his conviction that her errand had been to warn Martin Hale.

For the rest, however, he and the mountain girl could look at each other now without self-consciousness. Whatever mistaken trails they had each been tempted along, both of them were set the right way now. That bewitched hour in Malone's shack was like a dream or a memory of some other life and incarnation.

Suddenly Polly burst out with tears in her eyes:

"In this rain! Oh, Mr. Radnor, what will she do? What has happened to her?"

Jack winced.

"That's what I'm going to find out," he said, dully and turned to the door once more.

"Wait!" exclaimed the Toll-keeper, sharply. "I'm an old man, Radnor"—it was odd how easily he dropped the respectful prefix—"and I know something of the way to go about the sort of job you have in hand. You can't do it spent and weak; and you can't do it in weather like this, without changing horses. Hold on to yourself, man, and think—on her account, mind you: not on your own. The first thing to do is to take a drink—white liquor won't hurt you for once

in your life, son! Then go out and stable your horse in my barn and change your saddle to mine. She's not a prize winner but she's fresh and yours can't be up to much by this. Then come back here, and we'll decide what to do. The storm is letting up now and it will begin to be light in half an hour. With the dawn, and the rain stopped, and a new horse and something hot under your belt you can start out with some sense and hopes of finding her. Now, then, drink it down, and do as I say!"

When Jack had gone to the stable, the old Toll-keeper pulled himself out of his chair with an alert look on his face.

"You aren't going to do anything Dad!" said Polly anxiously. "Your heart——"

Her father laughed.

"My heart would break, Poll, if I sat still when trouble's in the wind. You know me! But no; I'm going to behave myself; you needn't worry. Only, I can't sit still! I'm going out to see when the storm will break."

The storm had, as a matter of fact, already broken; more, it had almost ceased. The last

wild rage of it seemed to have exhausted its vigor. The winds were trailing off in faint flurries. The rain was fine and feathery now and a fine gray light showed a whole continent of clouds rolling away beneath the Crossing. Light? It seemed not yet light indeed, so much as some mystic agent that made things visible in darkness. The dawn was on her way, but so far only the misty veil of her and her subtle perfume was all of which the world might take cognizance.

"It's over," said Richard Mason, breathing deep of the wonderful air, "but it's all but taken the mountain away from under us!"

"I told you it felt like that!" said Polly, coming to his side. "Oh, Dad, it's—it's awful," she gasped.

The slope above them leading to the top of the Ridge was a roaring torrent. They could see the gleam and hear the noise of it. On one side of the Toll Gate House a vast gulley had been washed almost to the very walls. The roads both ways were well nigh obliterated. Trees on every side—those small yet tough trees that grow on mountain tops—had been wrenched from the

streaming earth and lay prone and shattered or toppled limply with leaf-stripped branches. A tidal wave could scarcely have worked more havoc.

The dawn came more quickly now, as is its wont in summer after that first hesitating awakening. The horizon was suddenly splashed with greenish silver and a cold pale light crept out over the trumbled chaos of retreating rain clouds.

Jack Radnor came out of the stable leading Mason's brown mare, saddled.

"And now," he said, "I am going to start back along the Ridge, and stop at Malone's shack. She might have taken shelter there."

Mason looked doubtfully up at the brown river flooding down toward them.

"Doubtful," he was beginning, when Polly cried out joyfully.

Radnor's heart leaped then and sank, for it was Martin Hale riding slowly up from the Warm Springs direction.

"I couldn't make it on the Ridge," he called, before he was up to them. "It's nothing but a string of washouts all the way up, though I

reckon the top'd be safe enough if you could get to it. No news? Sorry, Radnor."

Polly's pleading face at the door drew him inside the house for a moment. "I'll be out to start with you," he said to Jack as he vanished.

"I'll slip away while he's inside," said Radnor, wearily. "He's had trouble enough for one man. Let him stay with your daughter. That's where he belongs. This—this is my job."

Old Mason nodded.

"You're men, both of you," he said tersely. It was the highest praise he knew.

A flock of twittering birds flew quickly up into the clearing ether. It was the first note of summer that had been heard since the beginning of what the people of that region were to call the Great Storm. Also with equal suddenness the smell of growing things woke in the clearing. The August day had fairly begun.

Suddenly Jack gave a sharp cry, and pointed, almost articulate. For up into the clearing beside the Toll Gate, plain enough now in the summer dawn, trolled wearily a jaded black horse with a side-saddle rather loose upon his back.

"Hers?" breathed old Mason.

Radnor nodded. He had ascertained from the stable man which horse Miss Forsythe had ridden.

The animal made his way to the front of the Toll Gate House, and as Jack sprang to his head did not even start.

"The beast's done," said the younger man over his shoulder.

Mason came to the horse's head.

"Pumping like a steam engine!" he agreed as he watched the heaving sides.

"But—look the way he's come!" said Jack, staring past the black horse into the mysterious valley growing ever more strange and more full of possibilities with the waxing light of dawn.

"I reckon," said Richard Mason, succinctly, "that you better get after your job, son, I'll look out for the beast."

Jack seemed to start the mare and mount her in midair, so fast was his departure. The old Toll-keeper smiled, sighed and shook his head, as he hooked his arm into the black's loose snaffle, and watched the other go. But Radnor was not unduly reckless. The road was practically a river

except on the edges. It required navigating. Without doubt navigate was the word! He knew that any horse would have enough sense to pick the soundest way, and peering cautiously, began to follow the foot-deep hoof prints of the black horse down the mud and ooze. Somewhere at the end of that unknown trail Enid was waiting, but—how?

CHAPTER XXVIII

SHADOWS FROM THE PAST

Old wishes, ghosts of broken plans,
And phantom hopes assemble. . . .
—ALFRED TENNYSON.

A BEAM of actual summer sunshine was lying on the threshold of the Toll-gate House when Mrs. Forsythe and Judge Denby crossed it an hour later. In a light rig they had made nearly as good time as had the men on horseback.

The Toll-keeper and his daughter met them with polite bewilderment. But old Mason's look changed almost instantly. Recognition lighted his whole weather-beaten face.

"Edith!" he said. And then: "I felt it; I knew she must be your daughter."

"It's thirty years, Dick!" she said quietly. Then turned to the Judge. "You remember each other?"

The two men's eyes were hard as steel in meeting. It was Denby's which softened to something very like an appeal.

"Won't you shake hands, Dick?"

Mason looked at the outstretched hand and shook his head.

"Why should I?" he said. "You sent me up here; made me an outcast and an outlaw and then helped to keep me what you'd made me. Oh, I've a damned lot of reasons for wanting to shake hands with you, your Honor, haven't I?"

He laughed grimly. The two women looked at him utterly perplexed. Even more puzzling was Judge Denby's attitude. All his confident, assured bearing was gone; his clean-cut handsome mouth was trembling. Richard Mason might have been the Judge and he the outlaw from the look of them.

"I treated you shamefully, Dick, long ago," he said, low and hurriedly, "but I've tried to be square to you in this—I mean of late."

"You mean," supplemented Mason, "in this rotten mountain-crook business of yours."

"You were in it as well as I," defended Denby. Mrs. Forsythe could hardly believe her ears, but that is what he said,—"And I always protected you, Dick, as soon as I knew who you were."

"I was in it," said the Toll-keeper, "because at first I drifted into it, feeling that as long as I had been turned out by society I might as well go the limit. And then I stayed in it because I found out who the ringleader was, and I was set to get that man before I died and see him in the jail he was born to fill!"

"Dad!" cried Polly, softly, "don't! You'll hurt yourself getting all worked up like that."

"Dick," said Denby, and he looked old for the first time in his life, "I came to bring—Edith,"—he called her so for the first time,—"and—to—" He hesitated while he tried his best to force some sort of a smile onto his twisted lips, "I believe Heaton calls it 'making a get-away' what I'm going to do," he said.

They stared at him. And for just a moment

something of his old dignity and authority came back to help him out.

"I'm through," he said. "Malone is ready to sell me out. I haven't a friend left. Heaton has been very generous. He will let me get away, and perhaps—perhaps Ralph will never find out just how much of a criminal his father was. If I stayed and faced my just deserts everything would have to come out, and it is he who would suffer. For me—well, it's not the easiest thing to carry fifty odd years—and such years—out into the world for a fresh start. But it's all I can do now to make up for what I have done in the past. Edith—I hope with all my heart your daughter will return to you in safety. But my presence here will only make you more miserable while waiting for news. I will go outside a little."

"Before you say good-bye," said Mrs. Forsythe, faintly. She was in fact terribly anxious to be free from his presence. And it was not solely repulsion she felt, shocked as she had been to learn of his duplicity. There was also in her heart an unreasoning pity and regret that one who had stood so high in the eyes of men should

be brought so low even in his own. She added impulsively: "I'm sorry—Arthur."

The Judge compressed his lips a bit more firmly. "I thank you, Edith," he said, with his old, beautiful courtly bow, and went out slowly into the morning light.

"Edith, there are tears in your eyes," said Richard Mason.

"Oh, Richard," she said, "my heart aches for—for almost everyone, I think, to-day. Do you—oh, do you believe that I shall have my little girl back safe and sound?"

"I believe that young Radnor would swim the Styx to get her back," said the Toll-keeper. "Sit down, dear woman, and try to rest a little. You must be worn out."

"Why—look!" Polly's voice was full of amazement. The eyes of the others followed her outstretched hand.

Down the muddy, streaming yellow road that led to the farther side of the Ridge, with his back turned toward the Warm Spring Valley and all within it, walked a man. He did not stride with the free tread of one used to going on foot, but

slowly, even awkwardly, like a man moving with bandaged eyes. So did Judge Denby walk out of their lives and out of his two diverse and extensive careers to regions unknown. No one of them—not even his son—ever saw him again.

CHAPTER XXIX

SUNSHINE AT THE FOUR TRAIL CROSSING

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
  Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
  From morn to night, my friend.
. . . . .
Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?
  Those who have gone before.
Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?
  They will not keep you standing at the door.

—CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

THE ego that was Enid Forsythe struggled up through infinite fathoms of unconsciousness.

First came bewilderment; then physical discomfort; stiffened limbs and a sense of chill. Then darkness again. But Enid was superbly healthy. She was not really hurt and her splendid youth was already at work in its healing processes.

Even as she lay motionless on the ground, she was remembering why she had come, and all that had happened. . . . And then she heard a horse coming and the creak of leather.

"Wouldn't it be funny," she thought, languidly, "if, after I had come to find him, Martin Hale should find *me?*"

She struggled to lift herself and gave a little cry to attract the rider's attention. Then she sank back into half-swoon once more.

As she drifted off a low, almost a harsh exclamation sounded in her ears: "Enid!"

She had not the smallest doubt that it was Martin Hale now. He had found her, just as she had imagined he might. He was big and strong. He would take care of her.

She felt herself caught up almost roughly in strong arms, and thrilled, even through the enervation of her fatigue, at the uncompromisingly masterful way in which she was being handled.

"Thank God for a man," she whispered in her heart, but there was a sting in the thought, too. If it could have been Jack. "But it could

never have been Jack!" she told herself recklessly.

"I may love him best in one way," but in the Big Primitive Things of Life women want something Big and Primitive to hold on to!"

She had an odd sense of trying to convince herself of something against her own will.

"I came here—I braved everything for Martin Hale—and he has found me! . . . Better yet—I have found myself!"

She was so exhausted that her very mental processes were confused. She felt herself lifted to the man's saddle—like a sack of meal; felt the spring of the horse beneath her, the steady grip of the hands that held her, the warm strength of the firm body against which she rested. In the semi-stupor of her state she seemed to see, as in an hallucination, the shadowy figure of Jack Radnor fading into infinitudes of distance. Her eyelids drooped into a sort of frown, but the vision persisted. It might be Martin Hale, Primitive Man of the Hills who held her, who had rescued her, but, as her senses swam into oblivion it was Jack Radnor of whom she thought with a

dull ache, Jack Radnor whom, after all, she loved!

She was—she admitted it to herself with a sort of sick sinking of her heart—miserable because it was Martin Hale who had rescued her.

It was bright sunlight when Jack Radnor carried his light burden into the Toll-gate House. He laid Enid on the couch and leaned against the table suddenly dizzy with the reaction of his hours of anguish.

Mrs. Forsythe and Polly flew to the half-conscious girl, and the Toll-keeper piled wood upon the fire and put on the kettle. The sunshine streamed into the room. The long night was gone like a bad dream.

But though color had come back to Enid's lips and cheeks, she did not seem to wish to make any effort to become herself again.

She lay lethargically on the couch, too weary in heart and body to open her eyes or move. She was reluctant, too, for with each pulse of returning strength in her blood she resented Martin Hale's rescue of her, and longed for the man she really loved. Dully, and as though from a

distance, she heard voices, Martin Hale's among them, but could only hear a word now and then. "Must be pretty well done up" . . . "riding half the night" . . . "Worst storm on record."

Loving hands held hot drinks to her lips and smoothed her hair.

"Mamma!" she whispered softly, but still she did not open her eyes.

"Thank God! Thank God!" whispered her mother, caressing her with trembling hands.— "And Jack," she added with a broken laugh, "for bringing you back to me!"

Enid's great golden eyes flashed suddenly wide open and a fiery flush swept from her chin to her shining hair. Jack! Impossible! Jack wasn't the sort who rode all night in storms in search of stray maidens! It— But standing close beside her was, undoubtedly, Jack. A very different Jack from the man to whom she had believed herself engaged—but the same. He was haggard with anxiety and sleeplessness and he needed a shave badly. But the whole of Enid's heart and soul leaped in her throat as she saw him, and she sobbed, "Jack!" in such a

tone that the others were fain to turn their eyes away. Radnor went up to her, as she lay a little figure of burning gold in the blaze of the golden sunshine that was streaming into the room.

"Are you strong enough to come outside with me?" he asked her in a low voice. For answer she sprang up, life running swift and eager in her healthy young veins. For her trail too was clear before her at last; nothing would ever be able to cross it again.

But if Enid expected a love scene she was doomed to astonishment.

For, when he had her outside the Toll-gate House, Jack seized her by the shoulders and confronted her with a look she had never seen before. It was a look though, which went very well with the headlong rescue of her at dawn. He was extremely pale—as white as a dark man can get—and there were shadows about his eyes. His usually correct dress was in startling disarray and his hair was in a wet tumble above the most stormingly scowling brows she had ever seen. His lips, however, trembled and so did the strong

hands that held her with a grasp that hurt. There was something of genuine anger as well as love in the passion that shook him.

"How dared you," he said, in a queer breathless voice that she would never have dreamed could come from his lips. "How dared you frighten me like this!"

"Frighten?" She was too surprised to more than repeat the word feebly.

He almost groaned. "I've died twenty deaths in the last three hours," he said, fiercely. "I've seen you in fragments at the bottom of cliffs, and drowned, and stunned by lightning and—" He broke off. "You little fiend," he muttered, very low but vehemently. "And you've nearly killed your mother as well!"

"But—Jack," she stammered wild-eyed, "it—it's so queer. I never *dreamed* you'd feel like that!"

"Didn't you?" he said grimly.

And then he shook her, not at all gently; and then clasping her close, kissed her lips over and over again—hard, stormy kisses that took her breath away. His arms felt to her like white-hot

steel quivering from some pulsing flame within them. . . .

"Oh, Jack!" gasped Enid when she could speak, "why—why didn't you do that before?"

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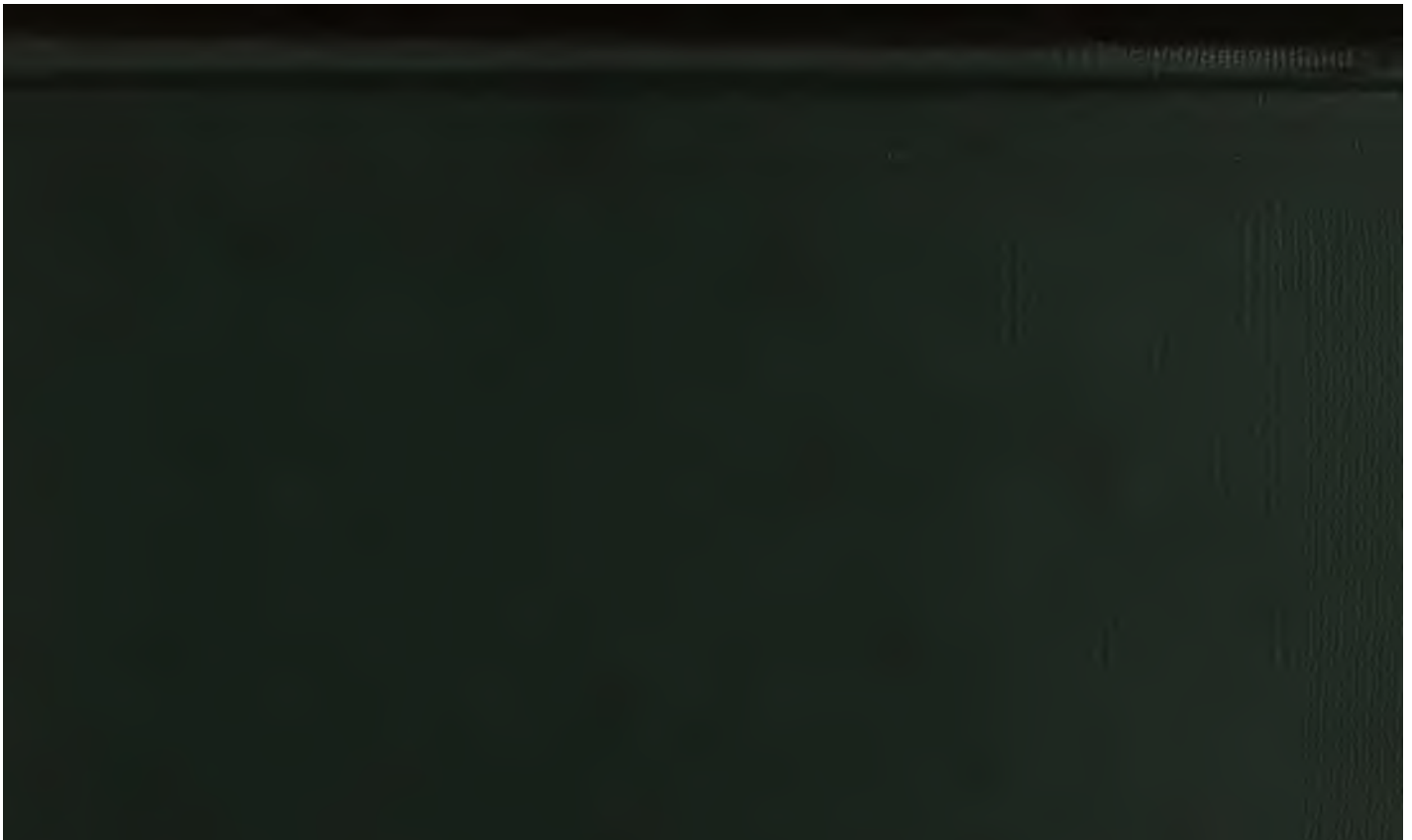
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